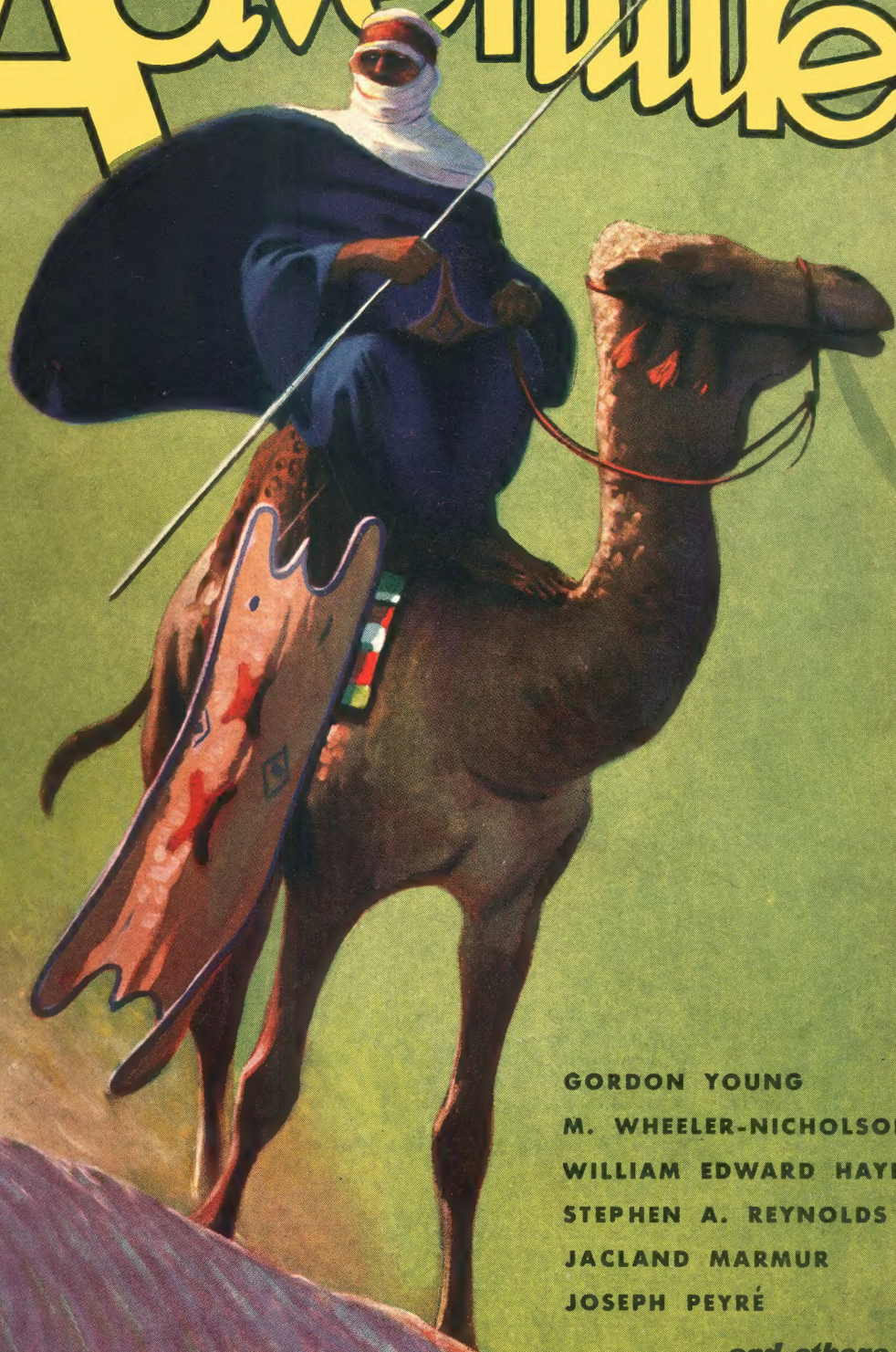


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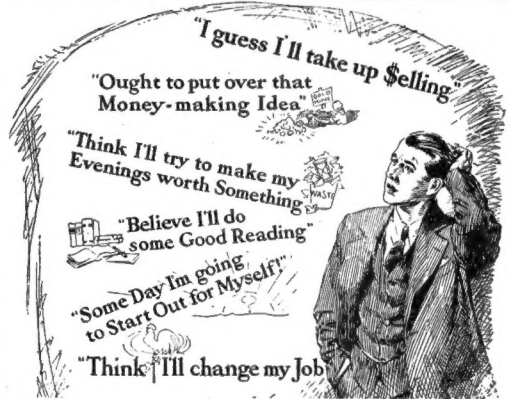
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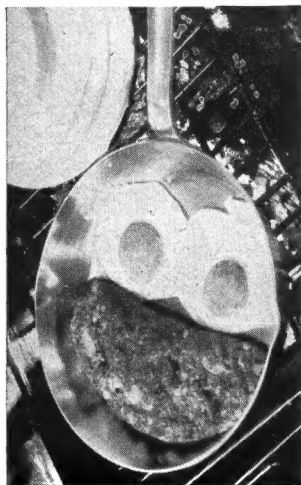
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A Story of the U. S. Cavalry

The RAPPING BAR

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

IN THE minds of most bachelor cavalry officers, sad to relate, the full dress uniform became indubitably associated with morning-after headaches. Benny Collins stared at his uniform with a jaundiced eye as it lay spread out neatly on his bed in all its splendor. On New Year's Day the custom of the service called for full dress and side arms, and a round of visits to every officer on the post. It is a well known fact that New Year's Day follows New Year's Eve. And Benny Collins, in company with the other officers of the Nth Horse, had seen the New Year in with fitting ceremony.

The death of the old year had been solemnly observed with copious drafts of a punch brewed at the officers' club. The formula of the punch was closely guarded, but the effect of it was no secret. Its potency was astounding. Therefore the jaundiced eye with which Benny Collins eyed the glory of his full dress uniform.

New Year's Day or no New Year's Day, this was a U. S. Cavalry post, and stables must be held and horse exercise carried out. Leading a troop through the Vermont snow, at a steady trot, five miles out and five miles back, is a healthy thing after a generous indulgence in the punch brewed by the Nth Horse. It had succeeded in convincing Benny Collins that, after all, life might possibly be worth the living.

Therefore he changed from woolen olive drab and russet leather to swagging sky-blue breeches with broad yel-

low stripe, to patent leather boots and gleaming spurs, and lastly to the full dress tunic itself. Its trim black broadcloth fitted like a glove, its high golden collar rising above the heavy gold of the shoulder knots. The final touch was the gold belt and sword slings carefully unwrapped from tissue paper and buckled into place, with the burnished dress saber taken from its chamois case and slung on the left side. To top off all this glory was the blue cap, with an arrogant golden eagle frowning down upon all beholders.

The last touches on this array were scarcely finished when Tommy Rethers, similarly effulgent, came stamping heavily into the room with a rattle of saber and a clink of spurs. He was pulling on his white chamois gloves.

"'Lo, Tommy," Collins greeted dispiritedly. "How did you feel this morning?"

"Rotten! As a gentleman should feel in the morning," returned Tommy. "Somebody led a squadron of iron hoofs over my alabaster brow last night," he explained, touching his forehead gingerly as though fearing it might cave in under too strong a pressure.

"Must have been something we ate," suggested Benny Collins, straightening out the twisted slings and snapping them into the hooks on his saber scabbard and then with one deft twist slinging the saber pommel front on its hook.

"Yeah, something we ate," grunted Tommy.

Both men looked out at the wintry



Vermont landscape and simultaneously reached for their capes, the long black broadcloth folds settling over the gleam of gold as they turned them, yellow lining outward, and flung them with a quick twist over their shoulders.

Their teeth chattered as they made their way to the bachelors' dining room where the rest of the junior officers were already assembled, similarly encased in blue and gold. Here a pause was made to sample the contents of a steaming silver bowl upon whose curving sides

was emblazoned the coat of arms of the Nth Horse, that coat of arms with its crossed sabers and its border containing the names of the battles from the Seminole Wars of Florida to engagements in the Philippine insurrection, and the confident motto: *Toujours prêt!* Once the silver bowl had done its work there was a noticeable rise in spirits, and even an occasional laugh above the hum of conversation and the clatter of sabers and spurs.

The boom of the retreat gun rattled

the windows and the shrill notes of "To The Colors" died away in silvery echoes as they stamped out of the bachelors' building and entered their first port of call, the quarters of the junior married lieutenant.

A beneficent Government does not award a married lieutenant anything especially vast in the way of quarters. To crowd some fourteen cavalry officers and their side arms into the tiny living and dining room of one of these houses is somewhat of a feat in itself. It argued well for the poise and stability of the fourteen men that they entered, partook of the hospitality offered and departed without spilling a drop.

Their numbers had now increased to fifteen, for the married second lieutenant aforesaid had done his duty as host and had now joined the ranks of itinerant guests, for such was the custom.

Thus they progressed, making their way to the quarters of the first lieutenants, and thence to the quarters of the captains. It was a wise decree of this ancient custom that started these calls with the junior officers, for, as their numbers augmented with each call, the houses grew larger and more commodious, in keeping with the increased rank of their occupants, not to mention the increased need of elbow room caused by the taking on of cargo at each port of call. The itinerant group had now grown to some thirty blue and gold clad officers.

It was somewhere between the quarters of the last senior captain and the domicile of the junior major that the need for song became evident to each and every one of them and accordingly they broke into a full throated rendition of "O'Reilly Was A Soldier":

O'Reilly was a soldier, the pride of Battery B;
In all the bloomin' regiment no better man than he.
The ranking duty sergeant, he did his duty well—
But the whole outfit is on the bum
Since down the pole he fell!

A few resolute voices carried the verse, but when it came to the chorus they all crashed in until the words rang down as far as the quartermaster corrals on one flank and out to the machine gun barracks on the other:

O'Reilly's gone to hell
Since down the pole he fell;
He drank up all the bug juice
That the whisky men would sell—
They've got him in the mill,
I guess he's in there still,
But the whole outfit is on the bum
O'Reilly's gone to he-ll-ll!

The tribulations of O'Reilly carried them into and out of the junior major's quarters, from which point they deserted the disgraced sergeant and voiced the woes of "The Poor Philippine Hombre."

There once was a Philippine *hombre*,
Who lived on rice, fish *y legumbre*,
His trousers were wide and his shirt hung outside,
But this, I must say, was *custombre!*

The chorus was a groan of sorrow for the poor benighted man. Some thirty voices wailed:

Ah-oo-oo-oo! Ah-oo-oo-oo!
The poor Philippine *hombre!*

His village once gave a *fiesta*,
Su familia tried hard to digest a
Mule that had died
With the glanders inside,
And now *su familia no esta!*

Ah-oo-oo-oo! Ah-oo-oo-oo!
The poor Philippine *hombre!*

The long drawn, quavering notes of the last word died away as they swarmed out of the quarters of the second senior major. There was one more field officer to call upon before moving in a body upon the colonel's residence. The song and laughter died down as the group stood uncertainly in the snow, the warm light from the houses sparkling on the gold of headdress and sword knot and shimmering on the silver of spur and saber. The compact clump of officers looked like a gold plumed group of dark

birds as they drew their black capes about them and stared at the silent house of Major Hartner. It was Benny Collins and Tommy Rethers who blithely started to lead the way when the voice of Captain Norton halted them.

"Hrr-um—" Captain Norton cleared his throat uncomfortably. "I suppose we're all ready to call on the colonel." His voice contained a rising inflection, but it was the rising inflection of certainty, with the steel of finality ringing in its note.

Still, Benny did not see the light.

"But we haven't called on Major Hartner yet," he complained.

A silence fell upon the group. It was a dispassionate sort of silence in which the rest of the officers stared seriously and coldly at this forward shavetail. And then without a word they turned their backs upon him and their patent leather boots rose and fell and their black capes fluttered in the wind as they trudged silently away from that lone dark house which contained Major Hartner.



BENNY COLLINS was somewhat bewildered by it all, and his bewilderment was in no degree diminished by the amount of hospitality of which he had partaken at each and every house. It was an amount that led him afterward to declare that he had saluted each of three colonels at the next stop.

But not even the surprise of seeing three colonels where one normally should have been could drive from Benny's mind the strangeness of that sudden silence and chill that had descended upon his brother officers as they stood before Major Hartner's house. What was it all about? He received only evasive replies. His captain was equally noncommittal, grunting only that Major Hartner was disliked because of some incident that had taken place in the Philippines two or three years previously.

And there the matter rested as far as Benny Collins was concerned. Due to

the fact that Major Hartner commanded the First Squadron and that Benny Collins was in the Third, he saw little of him while on duty. The major was present, of course, at officers' call each day, standing with the field officers, but somehow not of them, a dark haired, dark eyed man, his face impassive and cold.

When the officers came out of the adjutant's office and strict official decorum was relaxed and a buzz of talk and laughter broke out in the hallway, Major Hartner strode away in silence toward his own quarters. And when the officers wended their way to the club and gathered in front of the crackling fire and rank was shoved in the background and belts loosened as the stewards served hot toddies, Major Hartner was conspicuous by his absence.

At the weekly hops in the ballroom, colorful with the regimental standards and the troop guidons—hops which started out with the inspiring "Blue-bonnets Over The Border", the regimental galloping song, and ended with the wistful notes of "Benny Havens-O" and "Army Blue"—Major Hartner was still more conspicuously absent. He lived alone in his commodious quarters, there being no sign of any Mrs. Hartner to bear with him in his solitude.

The months went on with their rounds of Winter drills and horse exercise, lengthening into Spring, when the regiment shook itself and prepared for target practise, and through into the Fall with a hard and fit outfit clattering away from the post toward various maneuver sections. It was about this time that Major Hartner was transferred from the regiment, and Benny Collins lost sight of him for the time being. Later rumors came back that he had been made a "tac" at the Point and was on duty with the corps of cadets.

Still later, the officers' club at Fort Ethan Allen seethed with the news that the corps of cadets had congealed in its wrath and had made use of that seldom used weapon—the terrible silence. The times in its history when the corps has

turned out the silence for an unpopular officer can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The old graduates among the officers at the Fort Ethan Allen club discussed the thing wide-eyed. Only one among them, Captain Godfrey, the senior captain, had seen it used, and that away back before the days of the Spanish-American War.

As he described it, it must have been a soul shaking experience for any officer upon whom it was visited. Imagine the great mess hall at the academy and all its clatter of dishes and knives and forks and roar of talk and laughter from hundreds of cadets bubbling over with health and hard exercise and good bull meat and vitality. And then behold that reverberating clamor suddenly stilled as though an icy curtain had dropped over the great hall. Try to approximate the feeling of the officer whose presence had evoked the silence, as he essayed to walk to his table, unperturbed in outward showing. And picture that glacial silence continuing throughout the course of his meal and only ending as his nervous footfalls again crossed the outer threshold. Repeat that treatment for three meals a day and seven days a week and figure the effect upon the most hardened disposition.

It was said that Major Hartner stood it for ten days, showing no tremor of nerves nor any sign of his feelings. Then word came that he had been relieved by the superintendent, Colonel Masiter, who had him ordered elsewhere.

Again Benny Collins inquired as to the reason for all this, but he received scant satisfaction. The younger officers did not know and the older officers changed the subject. Where Major Hartner was sent thereafter Benny did not know and the entire matter finally receded to the back of his mind to be forgotten in the press of other things.

The war was on in Europe, and a premonitory thrill was going through the regular Army at the prospect of being involved in it. In due course of time Benny Collins fell heir to his tour of

foreign service duty and was transferred to the 'Steenth Cavalry, a colonial regiment in the Philippines. More months passed, and Benny found himself promoted from second lieutenant to first. Not long afterward his single silver bar was replaced by the twin silver bars of a captain.

And then came America's entry into the war and the silver bars were replaced by the golden oak leaves of major's rank and Benny found an entire squadron swaying and bending behind him on the drill field, its four war-strength troops responsive to his slightest gesture.

Glancing over the *Army-Navy Journal* one day, he noted that Major Hartner had been promoted to colonel and that Colonel Masiter, who had been the superintendent at West Point, had been promoted to a brigadier-generalcy. It occurred to Benny Collins that it was here in the Philippines somewhere that Major, now Colonel, Hartner had committed the sin of omission or commission which had won him such obloquy throughout the Service.

Schooled by past experiences, Benny made no effort to find out what it was all about, although the matter remained an unanswered question in the back of his mind. There were too many other matters to crowd it out, chief of which was the rumor that American troops were to be sent to Siberia. This rumor crystallized into reality in short order, for one day Benny was electrified by a telegram ordering him to report to Manila "equipped for extended Winter service."

Two weeks later he found himself in Vladivostok trying to solve the intricacies of the Siberian political tangle, with its conflicting forces of Reds and Whites and its numerous parties between, shading from a bright Pink to a dirty Gray.

As a liaison and intelligence officer in the field, Benny Collins found himself in the middle of things with both feet. He had not been in Vladivostok two weeks before he was appointed to the military mission ordered to travel to Chita and

there confer with a certain Ataman Semionoff, of the Trans-Baikal Cossacks. In the order summoning him to this duty he found two familiar names. One of these was that of Brigadier-General Masiter, chief of the mission. Next in rank after him came the name of Colonel Hartner.

In addition to his own name, there were three Allied officers also attached to the mission: Captain Scripps-Batesby of the Middlesex Regiment, Captain Townsend of the Canadian Contingent and Commandant Felix Girardet of the French Army. Also there was a certain Paul Kirilovitch Alexieff, a *korunji*, or lieutenant, of Cossacks, who was attached as interpreter.



BENNY COLLINS wasted no time in reporting to the chief of the mission, finding that individual closeted with the chief intelligence officer of the expedition. While waiting to report to his superior Benny studied his future commander. He found the man a rather fleshy, heavy jowled, cold eyed type with the stamp of the infantry upon him, and this Benny found a little disquieting, for there is a wide difference in temperament between the horseman and the foot soldier.

While he waited to report, another officer entered the room, and Benny turned about to find himself looking full into the face of Colonel Hartner, the latter with the same inscrutable, rather haughty air about him that he had worn with the Nth Cavalry back at Fort Ethan Allen.

Benny Collins rose instinctively and strode across the floor, his hand extended.

"How are you, Colonel?" he greeted. "I understand we are to be on the same mission."

"Yes?" responded Colonel Hartner coldly.

Deliberately ignoring the outstretched hand, he strode off across the room where General Masiter and the chief intelligence officer were engaged in seri-

ous conversation. Opposite the general's chair Colonel Hartner drew himself up to attention and saluted like any soldier—

"Sir, Colonel Hartner reports for duty in compliance with special orders No. 139, headquarters American Expeditionary Forces in Siberia."

Benny felt a sudden tenseness come into the atmosphere. The general stared long and coldly at the man before him. Hartner stood erect at attention, his face impassive, his eyes straight to the front. The silence was broken at last by the general's voice, which rang with icy disdain:

"Now that's just too bad, Hartner. I did my best to get the commanding general to detail some one else in your place, but I had no luck. That being the case, please be prepared to take the train leaving for Chita at 8:30 tonight." With that General Masiter turned away and resumed his conversation with the chief intelligence officer.

To Benny, watching this exchange, it seemed that the spirit of antagonism between the general and the colonel was so overpowering that it filled the room. But he saw no reaction on the part of Colonel Hartner except that a small vein throbbed in his temple. The colonel simply saluted again, turned upon his heel and strode from the room, completely ignoring Benny Collins' presence.

Benny whistled to himself. What a nice mess this was going to be, with a sour doughboy general in command and a sour cavalry colonel next senior, and a war on between the two! Benny's peace loving soul shuddered at the prospect of the long and dreary vista of unpleasantness ahead.

His depression was a little alleviated when he reported at the train that night and found his other traveling companions. The French officer, Girardet, turned out to be a charming and tactful Gaul, wearing the light blue and silver képi of a famous French Dragoon regiment and Benny's heart warmed to him

immediately as a brother cavalryman. The Canadian was a sleepy eyed, bulky chap with a quiet sense of humor. He and Benny quickly combined forces against the well nigh impervious insularity of the Britisher, Captain Scripps-Batesby, who twirled his monocle on a string and grinned amiably enough at their sallies.

The Russian, Alexieff, six strapping feet of him in a long, slim waisted, full skirted Cossack coat, topped by a jaunty white fur *papahka*, was an enigmatic soul, with wide-open tawny eyes and all the feline grace of a cat animal in his lithe movements.

He spoke English and French fluently and was the only one of them who seemed never to go unarmed; his curved, ivory handled saber and curved and jeweled dagger and his revolver seemed always to be at his waist. For the most part he made a silent background to the others.

They were assigned a Red Cross car, in reality a former baggage coach painted and fumigated and equipped with berths and a small kitchen. The sleepy eyed Canadian, the courtly Frenchman, the calm Britisher, the *korunji* of Cossacks and Benny Collins foregathered for the most part in the center of the car where they spent the hours pleasantly enough while the general and Colonel Hartner nursed their respective grouches at either end.

It did not take the foreign officers long to observe the strained relations between the two senior Americans.

"I say—" the Britisher screwed his monocle more firmly into his eye and glanced toward the far end of the car where naught was observable but General Masiter's broad back as he pored over some papers—"I say, do all your higher American officers carry so beastly much side? Such overwhelming gravity is frightfully depressing, what?"

Benny Collins shrugged his shoulders and cast a worried glance toward his chief's broad back. It was the Canadian who replied.

"Trust a heaven-sent Johnny Bull to get things hind end foremost!" he commented in a lazy drawl. "Can't you see, you poor benighted Yorkshireman, that those two Yanks hate each other like poison?"

"Oh!" returned the Britisher, blankly staring from one end of the car to the other. "Silly rot, I should say," he commented.

Even the tactful French Dragoon officer was moved to comment upon the strained relations between the two American seniors.

"Formidable!" he commented with an expressive shrug of his shoulders and let it go at that.

The situation was worse at mealtime, for the hostility between the two seniors weighed like a pall over what otherwise might have been a gay gathering. General Masiter ate in silence, replying in grunts or monosyllables to any remarks addressed to him. Colonel Hartner stared calmly through and beyond any one who addressed him, so that the rest of them soon ceased to notice him at all. Only the Russian watched them with speculative eyes, turning his wide, tawny eyes from one to the other as he munched his food and drank his tea.

Surprisingly enough, it was the Britisher, Captain Scripps-Batesby, who developed an unusual amount of knowledge concerning the mission upon which they were engaged and the conditions surrounding it. It was he who furnished the rest of them with many details concerning this self-styled ataman of the Trans-Baikal Cossacks, Semionoff, a title formerly pertaining to the imperial family and vested at the last in the Czarevitch.

The Britisher told them of Semionoff's excesses and the brutalities of the White forces under his command. He told them especially of the Train of Death, a gruesome string of cars which had been loaded time and time again with Semionoff's victims and run out to some siding where the poor devils had been butchered with machine gun fire until the cars

and the tracks ran red with blood. He told of seeing that train lined up on a siding with red icicles hanging from the cars, which were piled high with the bodies of the slain.

"Pretty rotten!" exclaimed Benny Collins.

"My word!" commented the Canadian.

"*Formidable!*" breathed the Frenchman, round eyed. As for the Russian, Alexieff, he smiled an enigmatic and faintly scornful smile and said nothing.



AT KHABAROVSK their car was put on a siding and billets provided in town while General Masiter conferred with the American authorities. Masiter himself was the guest of the American commander; Colonel Hartner found himself a billet by himself, no one knew where, while the rest of the group was installed in a villa that was formerly the residence of a high ranking Russian staff officer. The conference with the American commander extended into several days.

Meanwhile Benny Collins found tangible evidence of the atrocities committed by the Cossacks. The town of Khabarovsk was also the headquarters of the Cossacks of the Ussuri under the command of the Ataman Kalmikoff. The Japanese maintained their army headquarters here as well and subsidized the Cossacks, who formed a sort of gendarmerie.

As far as Benny Collins could discover, these Cossacks interpreted their duties as a license to execute any Russian who met with their ill will. Strange tales were told of their daily firing squads and of the gruesome cellars where their victims were clubbed to death without any form of trial.

He learned enough of the cruelty of both Reds and Whites in this bitter partisan warfare to marvel at the strange streak of sadism in the Russian nature, and at the Russian's callous indifference to death and suffering. From all he could gather conditions would grow

worse instead of better as he went farther toward the Urals and arrived at Semionoff's headquarters. For, while the Ataman Kalmikoff had some measure of Allied control over him, there was scarcely any over Semionoff.

It occurred to Benny Collins that there was a certain element of danger in visiting Semionoff—even for an Allied commission such as this. In this opinion he was supported by Captain Scripps-Batesby.

"My word, yes," agreed the Britisher. "He's a tricky sort of beggar, this Semionoff, just as likely to kiss us as to kill us. Moreover, he's in a frightfully exposed situation out there, surrounded by Bolsheviki on all sides. One never knows what those beggars are going to do next."

The conferences with the American commander came to an end at last and General Masiter ordered his party aboard their car. They went aboard late that night, expecting to be shunted off the siding and attached to a through train before morning. But Benny Collins found himself awake after daylight, and the car still resting on the same siding. There was a trample of hoofs from nearby and the sound of short, sharp commands in Russian. The American officer's quick ears sensed the presence of Russian cavalry and, being curious to see what it was doing, he dressed hastily, and dismounted from the car as he buttoned his blouse and strapped his pistol belt and holster into place.

There was no doubt in any one's mind that Benny was an officer; he had the trick of turning out in well polished leather at almost any time. Therefore the Cossack officer leaning negligently against a loading platform, not twenty feet away, snapped to his full height, clicked his spurs loudly together and turned out the strained and quivering Russian salute. Returning the salute, Benny gazed about him amiably enough until his polite smile became fixed and then slowly changed to a look of puzzlement. Something queer was going on here.

Not ten paces away from the Russian officer stood a squad of Cossacks on foot, some ten of them, their short carbines at "order arms". In front of them were two Cossack noncommissioned officers and a third man in Russian peasant blouse, baggy breeches and soft boots. This man was extremely pale and stared straight to the front. It took Benny Collins several seconds to figure out what the noncommissioned officers were doing. They were binding the man's hands behind him and tying him upright to a stake in front of the walls of a storage shed.

To Benny's startled eyes the situation contained all the elements of a nightmarish spectacle. But the pale face and anguished eyes of the bound man gave the scene its stamp of authentic tragedy. While the American officer stood there, uncertain and worried, the Cossacks finished their task and returned to the squad. The Cossack officer, repressing a yawn, barked an order at his men. They came to attention, snapped back the breech blocks of their carbines and crammed in a clip of cartridges each. The rifles came back to the order arms.

By this time Benny Collins found himself in a welter of confused ideas. It was only when the Cossack officer turned toward his men in highly bored fashion and opened his mouth to issue another order that Benny found his voice at last.

"What is it?" he asked the Russian officer, using one of the few Russian phrases he knew.

Convinced by this that his questioner understood the language, the Cossack officer entered into a long explanation in well modulated Russian, ending up by pointing from the rifles of his squad to the bound man in front and making an expressive gesture by drawing the edge of his palm across his own throat. That much was clear anyway.

"It's good night for this poor devil if I don't do something blame quick," Benny was thinking, "and blamed if I know how far my rights go in this case! Certainly that bird they're going

to shoot is a better looking *hombre* than any one of these Cossacks. I wonder who the dickens he is and how he got in wrong."

"*Nyet!*" Benny called suddenly as he saw the Russian officer about to issue the fatal command, thereby using up another one of his precious few words in Russian.

The Cossack officer looked faintly surprised, but nevertheless desisted. Plainly Benny could not get very far with his limited command of Russian in speaking to the Cossacks. A sudden brilliant notion came to him. Why not speak to the prisoner? At least he looked several cuts above the Cossacks in intelligence.

"*Russki?*" he asked, calling to the man in an effort to find out his nationality.

"*Nyet—no,*" responded the prisoner, in a flat, mechanical, strained sort of voice; and then he added another word that sounded like "*Hongroise.*"

"*Hongroise?*" called Benny.

"*Oui, monsieur,*" returned the prisoner in French.

"What is the matter?" asked Benny in the same language.

"It is that they go to shoot me," responded the prisoner.

"Do you wish me to prevent it?" asked Benny again, and flushed a little at the inanity of the question.

"If you can do so, monsieur," returned the prisoner in the same mechanical, restrained voice.

At that moment Benny heard some one stirring in the door of the car above his head and turned around to find the heavy bulk of General Masiter filling the entrance. The general descended heavily to the ground and stared around at the proceedings.

"What's going on here, Collins?" he asked sharply.

Benny Collins explained the situation hopefully, trusting that the general would straighten it out. But the general's response undeceived him immediately.

"Don't be a fool, Collins," he reproved sharply. "This is an affair for the duly

constituted Russian authorities to settle themselves. It's none of our business."

Benny Collins stared at him aghast.

"But, my God, General!" He found words at last. "These Cossacks are going to murder this man in cold blood! He's a Hungarian and an educated man—"

"I don't care if he's the king of Cambodia," growled the general. "It's none of our business, I tell you—" And the general turned away, leaving Benny Collins standing with a dull rage beginning to surge through him and with it a mounting determination to stop at any cost this crime about to be committed.

But before he could formulate any plan a quiet voice came from over his head in the car entrance. He looked up to find Colonel Hartner looking down at the scene. The colonel's cool voice cut through his confusion like a knife, although it was to the general that the words were addressed:

"Masiter," said Colonel Hartner slowly, his voice level, "those Cossacks are about to murder that man. Don't be a fool, Masiter!"

The general stared up, looking a little ludicrous with his open mouth. Benny Collins watched, amazed. And his astonishment deepened as the general growled something under his breath and shrugged his shoulders as he strode away from the vicinity. Colonel Hartner gave a quick nod to Benny Collins and disappeared within the car.

Emboldened with new energy, Benny turned to the Cossack officer.

"Get the hell out of here!" he said in English, waving his hands. "Beat it! Vamoose!"

He reenforced his orders with unmistakable gestures. The Cossack officer bowed in pained acquiescence, barked an order to his men and the whole crew stalked off to their horses on the far side of the tracks. Benny Collins found himself left alone on the scene with one recently saved prisoner. The pale faced man at the stake had not changed his expression in the slightest. Benny stared at him uncertainly; his course of reading

had not included a chapter on what to do with rescued prisoners.

Fumbling in his pocket, Benny found his pocket knife and awkwardly cut the man's bindings loose from the stake and released his wrists. Standing up straight, the rescued Hungarian essayed a bow of thanks. Midway in its course he suddenly keeled over in a dead faint.



BENNY started to chafe the Hungarian's wrists. He heard a quick step behind him, and then Colonel Hartner was looming above him, a canteen of water in his hand. With the water the colonel quickly revived the unconscious man and assisted him to his feet. Benny Collins noted that the colonel was as gentle as a woman and his motions as swift and deft as those of a well trained nurse.

"Here, Collins, help me get the poor devil into our car before they come back and shoot him."

Benny hastened to obey.

Between them they half supported and half lifted the apologetic Hungarian into the car, where already the cook had steaming coffee ready.

And there he breakfasted with them, striving desperately not to betray his gnawing hunger, but unable to repress a glow of happiness as he accepted and lighted a cigaret. Later, when they succeeded in making him talk a little, it turned out that he too was a cavalry officer—a former captain in the Hungarian Hussars.

Their engine came soon to shunt them off the siding and on to the train. The general returned, glowering at the presence of the Hungarian in their midst, but raising no objection when he was carried along with them as the train pulled out for Chita.

The Hungarian turned out to be a charming fellow. He spoke English very well, and after he had eaten and recovered a little of his strength he turned to Colonel Hartner, his face very grave, and made a dignified speech of gratitude, including praise for Benny Collins. Colo-

nel Hartner flushed slightly, but made no reply. The general stared into his plate and said nothing.

The train made many stops at small stations, passing now and again the inevitable Siberian village with its two long rows of log cabins and its golden domed church. The villages were succeeded by groves of willows and birch and by fields upon which rested great stacks of barley, wheat and rye straw.

It was tacitly agreed by the Allied officers that they should keep the Hungarian with them until they returned to Vladivostok. Technically he was a prisoner of war; actually he was a well mannered, intelligent officer and a good fellow and none of them wanted to see him run the risk of being shot down by the Cossacks. The only one who preserved an inscrutable silence on the subject was Alexieff, who treated the newcomer with sublime indifference.

As they went through Blagovastchensk increasing rumors of trouble at Chita came to their ears. One rumor had it that Semionoff's force had revolted. Another one stated that the Bolsheviki in the town and surrounding country had risen en masse and overwhelmed Semionoff's brigade of Trans-Baikal Cossacks.

So sinister were these rumors that the little group of officers grew perturbed. There was some talk of delaying their trip until the truth could be determined. But General Masiter would hear none of this. Shaking his heavy head, he insisted on going through. The rest of them, shrugging their shoulders, could do naught but follow suit.

Night came on while they were still some two hours from Chita. Their train was run on a siding while some other trains, going to the rear, passed them. It was Benny Collins who noticed that one of these trains was carrying two yellow flags on either side of the engine's headlight. When he remarked upon this, the Hungarian raised his head sharply.

"Two yellow flags, you say? That sounds like the private train of the

Ataman Semionoff," he declared.

The rest of them listened to this in silence, some of them shaking their heads. Benny Collins made his way to the far end of the car where the general sat in lonely state and broke this news to him. General Masiter grunted disdainfully.

"Impossible!" he snorted.

The train continued its progress somewhat slowly, making many halts while the engine blew long, inquiring blasts on its whistle. It sounded like some lonely primeval animal bellowing through the solitudes of the ages.

There was little sleep that night for the group of officers. During one of the train's many halts Benny Collins was certain that he heard the sound of firing and the blast of an explosion.

Five minutes later the train halted again. He dropped down beside the track and stared ahead to where a dull red glare rose against the sky. Again he heard the sound of firing. He wondered whether he should tell the general. But that worthy was asleep and snoring and Benny decided against awaking him.

The train at last entered the outskirts of Chita. Now there could be no mistake. Benny decided to wake up the general. Something was plainly amiss in this town. The night air was filled with a rattle of small arms, the chatter of machine gun fire and the occasional heavy booming of a field gun. The railroad yards seemed deserted as the train crept toward the station. Then it came to a sudden jarring halt before it reached the station and the occupants of the rear car heard the sound of shouts and a shot fired somewhere in front.

The general was busy buckling on his belt when suddenly in the circle of light cast by the lantern above the open door there appeared a bearded Russian face. The startled officers received an instant impression of red, inflamed eyes peering at them and a glimpse of the fellow's rifle and his crossed bandoleers. The intruder shouted—

"Boorjoy!"

He beckoned to some one behind him in the darkness. At that second Benny heard a revolver crack beside him and saw that the Russian Alexieff had fired pointblank at the man, dropping him as he ran. With a curse and a grunt Alexieff leaped down from the car and was lost in the darkness.

The shot was a signal for an angry uproar. The railroad yard suddenly filled with shadowy figures. Bullets began to crash and splinter into the car. The officers stood with hands on their pistols, pale and a little uncertain. But the Hungarian galvanized into action. He jerked the lantern from its hook on the ceiling above and sprang to the open doorway, waving it wildly and shouting something in Russian. The rifle fire died down and men appeared out of the shadows—unkempt and shaggy looking individuals armed with rifles and equipped with many bandoleers of ammunition.



TO A heavy jowled individual who seemed to be their leader the Hungarian held forth at length. More and more men pressed out of the darkness until Benny, looking past the Hungarian's shoulder, estimated that there were several hundred of them.

At last the Hungarian turned about.

"The town of Chita has been seized by the Bolsheviks," he stated hurriedly, a worried frown on his face. "We are surrounded here and outnumbered a hundred to one. I told them that you were an Allied mission and demanded non-interference. The best I could get was a promise from them that you would receive a fair trial. I advise you gentlemen to accept, for it is either that or quick and certain death!"

The Hungarian glanced apprehensively over his shoulder at the muttering mob.

General Masiter, his heavy face now pale, grunted assent, but the Hungarian paid no attention to him, staring instead from one to the other of the officers

until his eyes came to rest on Colonel Hartner, whose word he awaited. Colonel Hartner nodded. Much relieved, the Hungarian turned about and shouted to the mob outside. Two bearded Bolsheviks clambered up into the car and stuck out their grimy hands for the officers' weapons. Slowly and reluctantly each of the officers handed over his pistol. Then the captors motioned for the officers to get out of the car.

Colonel Hartner was the first to leap to the ground. He stood quietly and with something akin to contempt on his face as he stared over the heads of the threatening mob about him while the other officers followed.

"Death to the aristocrats!" shouted some one in the crowd, and the word death rose like an angry growl.

But the Bolshevik leader shouldered his way to the captives and set a guard about them. Surrounded by some twelve or fifteen men armed with long Russian military rifles and bayonets, the officers were moved down toward the station.

Scarcely had their march started when Benny Collins saw the mob scramble into the car, where it began to pillage the equipment and belongings of the officers. He noted also that the Hungarian had disappeared somewhere, and he wondered what had become of him.

The railroad sidings were lighted up by the glare of a burning building behind the station. Farther back in the town they could see the smoke and flames of other fires, but the sound of rifle and machine gun fire had diminished into occasional sporadic shots, from which the captive officers reasoned that the Bolsheviks were in complete possession of the town.

The prisoners were herded through the station. In the waiting room they saw many dead bodies, some of them clad in the uniform of the Trans-Baikal Cosacks, others in civilian clothes. The station walls and doors and windows were splattered with shots. Evidently a fierce fight had raged here. Issuing upon the street on the far side, they found

still more bodies strewn in their path. Near the hitching rack where normally stood the droshkies lay the body of a woman, her black hair matted with blood.

From somewhere their captors secured a country cart, and the officers were loaded into it. A guard sat by the driver, while others trudged along on foot.

"It's like riding to the guillotine in the old tumbrils, eh what?" remarked Captain Scripps-Batesby. His wit fell on unappreciative ears.

They were driven through the shattered, desolate town. It looked as if a hurricane had struck it. Stores and houses were gutted; furniture and bedding were strewn in the mud of the streets. A prowling dog sniffed over the smoking ruins of a house and howled lugubriously. Death and ruin marked the path of the Red storm.

They were driven through the Bolshy Prospekt and past the Hotel Dayooria. The hotel was a mere shell, the interior looted of everything movable. Articles too bulky to move easily had been dragged out and destroyed. Drunken Red soldiers were still at the task, staggering in and out, carrying pieces of furniture and dishes to the street.

Their guards led the officers to a long, low stone building surrounded by high walls. The depressing air of the place marked it unmistakably as a prison, a remnant of the old days of the Czars. The cart stopped at the entrance and the foreigners were led on foot through the courtyard. There was nothing cheerful about the view spread before their gaze. Evidently a firing squad had just completed its labors, for a row of still figures lay along the base of the wall which was pitted with rifle shots and smears of blood. Red soldiers shouted at the sight of the group of well dressed officers. Some one fired a rifle, but luckily the bullet went wild.

The interior of the building, whose dank and slimy corridors were lined with iron bound doors, was painted a hideous yellow. Small holes were cut in the walls

for the passage of food and water, the edges of the holes black and greasy from the touch of thousands of dirty hands.

The officers were led to a larger cell, evidently used in the past as a guard room. The windows were barred. There were wooden racks for rifles. A tier of bunks covered with unwholesome looking blankets, several wooden benches and a crazy table completed the furniture. Their guards stuck a candle upright in an empty vodka bottle on the table and filed out. The door slammed behind them and they heard the grating of a key in the lock.



THERE was something so sinister and fateful about the clang of that iron bound door and the rasp of the key in the lock that the six officers stared at one another wide-eyed for a second. Colonel Hartner seemed to be the only one who was indifferent. He seated himself on the nearest wooden bench and calmly lighted a cigaret. General Masiter, his heavy jowls sunk on his chest, strode back and forth across the room, sunk in dejection. The French officer, Girardet, took out a small silver handled pocket knife and began to file his nails.

"Rather a sticky situation, eh what?" said Captain Scripps-Batesby. He was polishing his monocle with a silken handkerchief. "From what I know of these Bolshevik beggars, they're likely to give us very short shrift."

He glanced at General Masiter curiously. The others followed his glance, and the general looked up to find the eyes of all of them fixed upon him. There was no reproach in their glances; simply an inquiring, speculative sort of look that might have been considered an accusation. The general, schooled in a system which forbade him to admit fault, flushed slightly and again sank his chin against his chest.

"Yes, I've no doubt that they'll line us all up and shoot us before daylight," continued Captain Scripps-Batesby, his tone equable as he continued to polish

his monocle, breathing upon it now and again.

"*Mais, certainement!*" echoed the French officer as if the subject admitted of no discussion.

The Canadian officer, Captain Townsend, sought in the pockets of his tunic until he found a cigar case. This he pulled out and politely offered it to his fellow prisoners. They, seeing that it contained but two cigars, refused them and the same thought must have flashed in the minds of all of them, a thought voiced by the Canadian as he selected one of the two cigars, bit off the end and lighted it:

"One to smoke now," he said, "and one to smoke before they lead us out into the courtyard. A drink would go awfully well right now, wouldn't it?"

The rest nodded wistfully. Colonel Hartner looked up.

"I brought along my flask," he said.

He fumbled with the inside of his short, fur lined coat and brought out a thin, flat, but rather long, silver flask capped with a small silver cup. A certain diffidence was noticeable about him as he held it for a second, and then, noting the pleased look on the face of the Canadian, he offered it to him first. The Canadian officer filled the silver cup and tossed off the drink.

"By gad, that's good Scotch!" he said as he held the flask and cup, looking at Colonel Hartner inquiringly as if to ask where he wished it to go next.

The colonel indicated the French officer, who poured himself a very small drink and tried not to make a wry face as he drank down the unaccustomed liquor. He in turn passed it to the British officer.

"Cheerio!" he toasted. "I say, rather good, that!" he remarked as he passed the flask and cup to Benny Collins.

Benny noted the haggard eye of the general resting on the flask and cup and, turning, he offered it to him. Benny failed to note the sudden sharp look that Colonel Hartner bent upon him. The general started to accept the prof-

fered flask when his hand suddenly arrested itself in midair.

"Is that your liquor, Hartner?" he barked.

Colonel Hartner made no reply, simply gazed level eyed at the general. They had all gathered about the table, with its single wavering candle which lighted up the general's heavy features, the clear cut face of Colonel Hartner and the rather startled faces of the other four officers. Into the silence that had fallen over the group there came the sudden crash of a single shot from the courtyard outside, followed by a long drawn, quivering scream that was stopped suddenly by the crash of another shot. Instinctively the heads of the other officers turned toward the door, but Colonel Hartner and General Masiter continued to stare at each other, oblivious of all outside sounds. And then came General Masiter's heavy voice:

"Hartner, I'll neither drink with you nor touch your damn liquor," he said contemptuously.

The attention of the other officers came sharply back to this tense situation in their midst. Colonel Hartner's eyes smoldered and he turned white about the nostrils. But his voice came evenly enough when at last he spoke:

"Masiter," he said, "since you've had the bad taste to bring such a matter up in the presence of three foreign officers, you owe it to me and to them to state upon what grounds you base your objections to drinking with me!"

The words came in a level tone, but there was all the effect of the cracking of a whip in the incisive way in which they were spoken. The general flushed angrily and his heavy face set into stubborn lines.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," he grunted.

"No?" Colonel Hartner's voice cut through the silence like a steel drill. "Then you force me to bore the officers present with the explanation of your ill timed rudeness." So saying, he turned

from the general as if that officer no longer existed and spoke to Benny Collins—

"Collins, if you'll stop gaping at me like a dying duck in a thunderstorm and pour yourself a drink and pass me the flask, I'm liable to get reminiscent for the first time in my life."

Collins, startled into sudden action, nearly spilled his drink before he complied. With the flask and cup once more in his hand, Colonel Hartner poured himself a neat two fingers of Scotch.



"*"SALUD y pesetas y cosas nuevas!"* he toasted. "Health and money and new things, as the Spaniard says. Gentle-

men, I hate to be a calamity howler, but I am afraid the next new thing we face is going to be a Bolshevik firing squad. While I dislike to grow autobiographical, General Masiter has seen fit to disturb what is likely to be our last few hours by raising a questionable issue in your presence—" and he nodded to the British and the Canadian and the French officer. "Also, gentlemen, this seems likely to be the last opportunity I will have on earth to explain the causes of the general's attitude . . ."

Colonel Hartner came to a pause and stared across the room at the shadows cast in the corners by the wavering candlelight. In the silence the officers around that table heard the drunken shouts of the Red soldiers in the courtyard, almost drowned out as they listened by the terrified screams of some one farther along the corridor.

Evidently the unfortunate being, whoever it was, was being haled out of a cell, for they heard his struggles and the thud of kicks and blows with rifle butts as he was dragged along the corridor, his screams growing weaker until they died out in the courtyard. In another minute there came the crash of a ragged volley. The faces of the officers in the radius of the candlelight settled into thoughtful lines.

"You know, gentlemen, all of you be-

ing officers in the regular established armies of your respective countries, that rumor and gossip can come close to making or breaking an officer in the service. You know that if an officer is once tried by court-martial, few of his scattered comrades take the trouble to determine whether he was found innocent or guilty. The mere fact of having been tried by court-martial operates, in our widely scattered American Army, to create a prejudice against an officer throughout the service.

"If, in addition, the charges upon which he was tried are sensational they are distorted as they are carried by word of mouth from the Philippines to San Francisco and from Washington, D. C. to Vermont or the Panama Canal. It has been my misfortune, gentlemen, to have suffered for many years under such a cloud. And as I consider General Masiter primarily responsible for much of the indignity which I have suffered, I should like him above all to hear the truth."

"I can't very well get away from the sound of your voice, Hartner," broke in General Masiter's heavy tones.

"Exactly!" agreed Colonel Hartner.

He offered his flask again to the other officers and took another drink himself before he plunged into his story.

And then to the accompaniment of sporadic bursts of firing and the crescendo of wild screams and cruel shouts from the courtyard, he began his story.

His main trouble had been, he admitted, that he had been oversensitive as to his obligations to his juniors. Somehow he had always felt that the doctrine of noblesse oblige applied particularly to an Army officer and that power exerted toward juniors without a sense of responsibility was peculiarly the failing of an ill bred man, and that correspondingly a man was only a real aristocrat to the extent to which he envisaged his responsibilities to those below him as well as those above.

The French army was the only real democratic army, he said; the British

army was frankly an aristocratic army, but it had in most cases a caste of aristocrats to act as officers and a survival of the old squire and tenant relation to smooth the enforcement of discipline. The American Army, he was afraid, had copied the aristocratic forms of the old British army, but had failed to copy the aristocratic spirit.

In other words . . . but here he confessed that he was getting too general in his remarks and, as the clamor from the courtyard outside was increasing in volume, he thought that he had better hurry on with his story. If those Bolsheviks got thoroughly maddened with vodka they would probably massacre every prisoner in the place.

His Army career, he went on, was uneventful enough until he reached the grade of major and found himself out in the Philippine Islands in command of a squadron of cavalry. For the most part his troop commanders were seasoned men and his subalterns were good material. But there was one among the latter, a certain Second Lieutenant Brodney, who threatened on arrival to be somewhat of a problem. Not that there was any harm in the youngster, but four years at the Academy had not cured him of a certain habit of rushing at things without reflection. He invariably exceeded his orders and generally succeeded in balling things up.

"You know how it is in the Army," said the Colonel. "If you exceed your orders and get away with it, you're an efficient officer gifted with superb initiative, but if you exceed them and don't get away with it, you're undisciplined, insubordinate and everything else in the decalogue of crime."

This youngster, Brodney, [he continued] invariably came a/cropper every time he tried to show too much initiative. He'd be sent out for a ten-mile hike under the tropic sun and he'd take the troop fifteen miles, leaving a foundered horse somewhere along the road. He'd be ordered out for two hours' pistol practise with his men and he'd stay three

hours, and into the bargain, some dumb trooper would either shoot himself or his horse. And so it went.

His troop commander was all for putting the youngster in arrest and giving him a sharp lesson with a set of charges, but he, Hartner, demurred at this. He never liked to clutter up a youngster's record with courts-martial, seeing how such things stuck to one throughout an Army career. He asked the troop commander to let him try his own hand with the youngster, and thereafter he kept Brodney under his eye. He tried to show Brodney the error of his ways, and Lord knows there was opportunity enough to correct him, for the kid had an astounding faculty for getting himself into hot water.

It is strange sometimes how a man will pick a horse very similar to himself in disposition. And Brodney was no exception. There was a horse called Bruiser in B Troop that could jump marvelously well, at times. He was a raw boned, heavy headed animal, a little narrow between the eyes, resembling in that respect Brodney himself. And like Brodney, this horse rushed his jumps, all fire and enthusiasm, and generally managed to knock down a bar or two or to crash through the top row of wooden blocks. In other words, he was very far from being a clean performer.

Loafing around the exercise ground one day, Hartner found Brodney working his horse with a cavesson and longe. That is, a sort of halter and rope arrangement by which a horse is made to move around his trainer in small circles. It is used sometimes for schooling a horse over jumps without a rider. The major stopped to watch the workout. True to form, old Bruiser was rapping the top bar with knees and feet every time he went over. Brodney, a slim, nice looking sort of youngster, was plainly discouraged as Hartner rode up.

"Major," he complained, "I can't make this infernal brute go over his jumps cleanly. He rushes them every time."

"Why don't you try a rapping bar?"

asked the major.

"A rapping bar? What's that, sir?"

The lieutenant looked puzzled. The major explained to him, showing him that it was a light bar studded with nail heads which was held along the top of the jump by two assistants and brought sharply against the horse's legs any time he dragged his hoofs over the jump. It taught the animal to pick up his feet and make a clean jump.

The next day the major rode out again and found the lieutenant working the horse over the jumps on the longe while two soldiers held a light rapping bar between them. After the first four or five sharp raps old Bruiser came snorting at the jumps with something akin to apprehension showing in his eye—but he tucked his feet up under him.

The next day the youngster's captain came roaring up to the major on the picket line, swearing a blue streak. Between lurid curses the captain howled that he'd ordered the kid to take the troop over the Russian Ride Course once during drill, but instead, while the captain was absent on some other duty, Brodney had spent the whole drill period galloping the troop back and forth over that course.

Now the Russian Ride Course isn't very severe when taken once or twice in the tropical heat. But to lead an entire troop over its nine jumps some fifteen or twenty times in the course of a morning is going to make casualties of some weak horses. And this it did. The captain pointed out a group of six or seven cripples on the picket line suffering from various kinds of lameness and other disabilities.



IT WAS the last straw which broke the good captain's back. He demanded either that the major punish the kid himself or that his troop commander be allowed to do so. Faced squarely with the issue, there was nothing that Hartner could do. Rather heavy hearted, it must be admitted, he asked the regi-

mental commander, Colonel Ramsey, to confine the kid to the limits of the post for a month. When this was duly accomplished the major called the youngster in and informed him of the whys and wherefores, reading Brodney a heavy lecture on his sins.

"You see, Brodney," said Major Hartner, smitten by a sudden inspiration, "you're just like this horse, Bruiser, who rushed his jumps. Like him, you need a rapping bar. And I hope this month's confinement to the post will teach you to tuck your feet under you and come clean over your jumps."

The kid took the punishment in good part. But when one begins to mix into his fellow man's destiny there is no telling where it is going to end. The punishing power must be used wisely.

At this point of his story Colonel Hartner paused and listened with the others to the hellish noise in the courtyard outside. The candle was half burned down and it threw vague, grotesque shadows in the corners of the stone walled room. In its wavering light the faces of the four officers who sat around the rickety table looked pale and strained. General Masiter sat in sulky silence against the wall, his face looming heavily out of the shadows. Colonel Hartner continued . . .

The punishing power must be used with judgment or else you have *that*—he jerked his head toward the courtyard, which throbbed and screamed and thundered like the discords of a mighty pipe organ played by an inexperienced hand. Hartner's efforts to discipline the lieutenant—discipline in the military sense—met with an unexpected and unpleasant result.

Any one who knows Army post life knows that at a large post like Camp Stotsenberg in the Philippines there can generally be found a little coterie of consistent gamblers who play night after night. Like all such groups, they welcome "fresh meat" in the form of the tyro still to be blooded to the game.

Generally they are older officers who consider it fair play to take the youngster's money away from him on the assumption that a man learns better poker by his losses than by his winnings. Whatever the ethics of their viewpoint might have been, they certainly administered an expensive series of lessons to young Brodney.

The first that Major Hartner knew of it was a call to the post commander's office. Colonel Masiter was then Post Commander at Camp Stotsenberg.

"What in blazes do you mean, Hartner, by letting one of your youngsters go hog wild at gambling?" blazed Colonel Masiter at the major.

The major sought and found the explanation. Brodney had signed I.O.U.'s all over the place for amounts far in excess of his ability to pay for a year or two to come. Now the major felt responsible for having let the kid in for this. It was his attempt to use the rapping bar on the youngster that had resulted in his confinement to the post and his introduction to gambling. But Major Hartner made the single error, from Colonel Masiter's viewpoint, of offering to straighten out the kid's difficulties.

It was a fatal error, because Colonel Masiter immediately announced his intention of preferring charges against Brodney. To understand this fully, one must know that years before when Hartner and Masiter were still lieutenants stationed at Fort Leavenworth they paid court to the same girl. And Hartner had won her.



HERE General Masiter's heavy voice boomed in from the side wall:

"You're insane, Hartner, if you believe that my failure to win Milly had anything to do with my decision in regard to young Brodney. He had a sharp lesson coming to him and I was prepared to see that it was administered, seeing that you had failed."

"Yes?" returned Hartner wearily. "You'll have to admit, however, that

ever since that night Milly sent you packing and I remained behind, our relations have been anything but friendly."

The argument might have grown acrimonious, but it suddenly ceased as every officer in the room turned his head toward the door. They all sat tense and rigid as they heard the sound of a group of men coming toward their cell. Nearer and nearer came the clamor of shouting voices and stumbling feet. Then they halted outside the door. Hands fumbled with the lock. There were shouts in Russian—

"Kill the bourgeois!"

None of the officers rose from his place, but all of them watched the door until the mounting clamor was suddenly stilled and an authoritative voice drove the intruders back down the corridor. Something like a faint sigh went up from the officers. His voice untroubled and his face calm, Colonel Hartner went on with his story:

In any case [he said] the charges were drawn up that very afternoon and forwarded to Manila. As might be imagined, Hartner was downcast. But that night he saw what might prove to be a way out. Cashing a check for a good amount at the post exchange, he sought out the nightly poker game with a roll of several thousand pesos in his pocket.

The major was a skilled and wary player, a veteran of many hard fought poker battles, but that night he played and plunged as he had never played and plunged before. At three o'clock in the morning he sat with a hand of stud and five thousand pesos in the pot on the table before him. He started raising with two kings back to back. At the third round he drew another king and boosted the pot a thousand pesos. At the fourth round he drew the fourth king and boosted the pot again with two of the best players staying. He rose from that table the heavy winner.

Then and there he bought back for cash every I.O.U. that Brodney had given out.

Next morning he appeared at Colonel Masiter's office only to find that the colonel had started on a trip to the southern islands the night before. Colonel Ramsey was in command; he was the regimental commander of the cavalry outfit. Hartner thought at first that with his own colonel the matter would quickly be solved, but he found Colonel Ramsey obdurate. No, the colonel would not, while in temporary command, set aside any of the more important rulings of the permanent post commander.

As decent a file as Colonel Ramsey was, he refused to take the step that would save the kid from a court-martial. At last the major gave up his attempt to have the charges recalled and played a final card, asking Colonel Ramsey for permission to go to Manila and plead with the commanding general. This permission was granted.

That afternoon Hartner went to Manila. He sent in his name by the general's aide and was asked to wait, as another officer was closeted with the general. So Hartner waited, drumming his heels in the general's anteroom at the Cuartel España. At the end of fifteen minutes or so the door to the inner office opened and who should come out, all smiles, but Colonel Ramsey!

"I got to thinking it over, Hartner," explained Ramsey, a little shame faced, "and decided to come down here and give you a hand. That Masiter is a hard brute anyway. It's all right with the general. He's torn up the set of charges."

Behind Colonel Ramsey Hartner saw the white hair and mustaches of the general himself; he beamed and sent them on their way rejoicing.

On the way back to Camp Stotsenberg, they stopped at a few cantinas and came into the post in high spirits. Mrs. Ramsey swore that the two of them blew in somewhere in the neighborhood of three o'clock in the morning, singing a song to the effect that they were little toy drums who'd lost their

hums, but Hartner was certain that she exaggerated slightly.

But the main thing was to break the glad news to the youngster. Hartner found him sitting up, pale and drawn; but the kid took a new lease on life on receipt of the welcome news. They grew very confidential in that early morning talk. The kid told of his dreary childhood without father or mother, raised in the household of a distant and dour relative who received funds each month for his schooling. The kid stated that his father was dead and that he had never seen his mother, although he had the feeling that she was alive somewhere and cherished the dream of some day meeting her. Anyway, he was frightfully grateful, and thereafter gave the major a sort of dumb worship that was almost embarrassing at times.

Just about this time trouble broke out afresh in the southern islands and the regiment was ordered to Manila to await transport to Jolo.

They were several days in Manila, and in the course of their stay Hartner met Charley Robinson, who was detailed as the colonel of Constabulary. Charley and he were classmates and they had some drinks and a dinner at the club. He told Hartner of his duties and the trouble he was having in cleaning up the red light district along the Passay Road. Evidently he was beset with difficulties, but one thing he told Hartner brought the major up alert. Robinson told of running across a dissolute white woman, a hanger-on at one of the dance halls who, in her drunken moments, claimed to be the mother of a young cavalry officer. His name was something like Rodney or Brady, or something like that.

"Was it Brodney?" asked the Major.

That was the name, yes.

Hartner was shocked with apprehension. There was the kid's story of the mother he had never seen and his dream of some day meeting her, a dream in which he idealized that unknown wo-

man. It would be a cruel, brutal thing if ever he were faced with the reality.

"What did this woman call herself?" he asked Robinson.

She was known as Frisco Kate.

Luckily the regiment was to go aboard ship in the morning. Hartner saw to it that the youngster was busy on duty below decks while they were embarking, and he himself watched the dock very narrowly until the ship put out into the stream. He breathed a sigh of relief as they headed toward the Sulu Sea.

They arrived at Jolo in time to get into the Bud Dajo business—and you know what sort of bushwhacking that was. It was pretty tricky work down there, all in all, what with treacherous *datos* and wild eyed *juramentados*, who were likely to pop out of the grass at any time and slice up all and sundry. They had their troubles, losing one officer from the regiment right in Jolo itself when one of the *juramentados* smuggled himself past the gates in a cartload of sugar cane and leaped out and chopped down a lieutenant who was taking a stroll with his young daughter. In the course of the pacification in Jolo, Hartner's squadron was ordered up along the coast of the island with its headquarters at a small town opposite the island of Patal.



THEY had a good deal of trouble there with an outlaw chief named Selungun—a freebooter and pirate who led his gang of Malays up and down the coast to harry and burn and slay. Time and again word came of his presence, but each time the troops arrived too late to find anything but burning shacks and badly cut up natives. There was a heavy reward out for the capture of Selungun and the whole southern department was after his scalp.

It would be a big feather in the cap of any officer who captured Selungun. Naturally the major was keen on running him to earth. He kept a sharp

lookout up and down the coast. He made friends with the sea gypsies, the Bajaus, who were inoffensive coast Moros and fisher folk, living aboard their catamarans and harming no one—in sharp contrast to their inland Moro brethren.

He prevailed upon these people to carry him word of any projected raids on the part of Selungun.

Twice a week a large launch came out from Jolo and brought mail and supplies.

It was on one of the visits of this launch that Hartner received a letter from the regimental commander, Colonel Ramsey. It was a personal letter giving the news and gossip, but it contained two items of special interest. One of them was that Colonel Masiter was now in command at Jolo. The second piece of information made Major Hartner sit up and swear.

It was that a rather bedraggled and dissolute white woman, known as Frisco Kate, had managed to gain passage from Manila down to Jolo where she had interviewed Colonel Ramsey, claiming to be the mother of Lieutenant Brodney and claiming a mother's privilege of being allowed to see her son. Colonel Ramsey knew nothing about it, but he had refused her permission to depart for Lieutenant Brodney's station, giving as an excuse the danger involved during the existing state of war. But, the letter went on, in spite of this refusal, the woman, who seemed to be well equipped with funds, had hired a Spanish launch and departed that day.

Major Hartner did some swift figuring. Frisco Kate had departed on the Spanish launch before this letter had been written. In other words, she was due to arrive at the village at any time. And Brodney, whom he had made squadron adjutant, sat right across from him at a table on the other side of the room. Major Hartner walked out quietly and found the petty officer in charge of the Government launch, asking him if he had seen anything of the

Spanish launch and its woman passenger.

Yes, sir, the petty officer had seen it; he had passed it not two hours back, coming along the same course.

In other words, Frisco Kate was due to arrive in two hours. And unless Major Hartner did something quickly that decent youngster, Brodney, of whom he had grown very fond, was due to be subjected to the worst disillusionment of his life and to be humiliated past all endurance. It would be the ruin of his Army career; for with such a character publicly acknowledged as his mother he could not face his brother officers or his men.

Just about this time a prau manned by several Bajau Moros came into the bay and beached near the landing stage. From it a long haired Bajau came up and sought permission to see the major. Through an interpreter he informed Hartner that Selungun, the pirate chief, with no force with him except five followers, was appearing openly on the shores of a small island midway between Sulu and Patal.

Suddenly the solution of a vexing question dawned on the major. The Naval launch was still moored at the landing stage. Here was Lieutenant Brodney. Major Hartner saw an opportunity to do two things: to permit his lieutenant to secure the glory of capturing Selungun, and to get him away before Frisco Kate arrived on the scene. Inside of fifteen minutes he had Brodney out on the launch with an escort of twelve men. The launch went on its way to capture Selungun.

An hour or so later the Spanish launch with Frisco Kate on board came puffing into the bay, and in a few minutes more Frisco Kate appeared at squadron headquarters. She departed thirty minutes after she had arrived, leaving behind her a promise to abstain in the future from ever appearing anywhere near her son.

Here Colonel Hartner paused and lighted a fresh cigaret. The clamor in

the courtyard rose and fell. General Masiter's voice broke in upon the reverie into which Colonel Hartner had temporarily sunk.

"Go on, Hartner, tell 'em the rest of your sob story. Tell 'em what happened to young Brodney!" jeered the general's heavy voice.

The rest of the story was more or less a matter of public record, Hartner continued evenly. Several hours later the launch returned manned by its crew of four sailors and carrying two wounded soldiers who had managed to break away from the massacre. For a massacre it was. Selungun was on the island all right, but he had hidden nearly a hundred of his followers in ambush in the jungle. Had Brodney obeyed his instructions and landed on the south side of the island and crept across, he might still have escaped by catching the Moros in the rear. But, impatient to come to close grips with his quarry, he had landed boldly on the north shore and walked into the trap set by Selungun. The Bajau fisherman who brought the news had been, in reality, one of Selungun's own men and the whole thing was a typical piece of Moro trickery.

Of his own feelings Hartner said little, but it was plain to his listeners that the death of the boy had affected him very deeply. What followed thereafter seemed almost trivial by comparison.

But what followed thereafter was bad enough in all truth. For Colonel Masiter was in command at Jolo. Upon receipt of the report of Brodney's death he immediately ordered Hartner to report into headquarters in arrest. Disregarding the reports of the investigating officer, which exonerated Hartner, Colonel Masiter ordered him tried by court-martial for one of the most terrible offenses in the lexicon of the military man.

The charges read, "For conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman," in that "the said Major David Hartner had shown cowardice in sending a subordinate to execute a dangerous mission

which properly should have devolved upon himself." There were other specifications under other charges, neglect of duty and so forth, but the ugly word *cowardice* resounded throughout the Southern Archipelago wherever officers and men were stationed. Although the court-martial found him not guilty, that sinister word echoed in Manila and from Manila to the American hinterland, where he felt its repercussions in Washington, D. C., at Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont, and at the West Point Military Academy where Colonel Masiter was in charge and could have scotched the evil rumor had he so desired . . .



"AND as you see, gentlemen, there are two sides to every story," said Colonel Hartner. "Do you wonder that I took offense and was desirous of explaining the general's refusal to drink with me?"

The officers did not glance back at General Masiter, glowering behind them in the shadows.

"You were handed a rotten deal, Colonel," said the Canadian officer gravely.

"Straordinary! Most 'straordinary!" spluttered the Englishman indignantly, and turning, he glared through his monocle at General Masiter.

"Formidable!" exclaimed the French officer. "*C'est comme l'affaire Dreyfus!*"

Benny Collins said nothing, but at that moment he could have been tried by court-martial ten times over for his opinion of General Masiter.

But General Masiter cleared his throat and spoke in his turn:

"You've told a very pretty story there, Hartner." His heavy voice contained more than the hint of a sneer. "A very pretty and a very plausible story. But you've always been a plausible fellow, Hartner, able to make the women hang on your words. To a plain fellow like me, who simply saw his duty and did it and never succeeded much in currying favor with the ladies, you were always pretty much of a mystery. I've no

doubt you won Milly by some such plausible methods. You neglected to state in your story whether or not your skill at winning her ever developed into the ability to make her happy. What-ever became of Milly, Hartner? Answer me that?"

Hartner flushed and his eyes suddenly grew haggard. For the first time he showed his years.

"Go on, Hartner!" came Masiter's heavy, jeering voice. "What became of Milly?"

"I thought you knew, Masiter, what became of Milly," he said in a low voice. His features contracted spasmodically as though drawn by pain. "I thought you knew that she had run away with a vaudeville actor."

"No, I never knew that," boomed Masiter. "So you couldn't hold her after you got her? That's how that affair turned out, eh?" he jeered from the darkness. The candle, burned down to the bottle top, guttered and went out, leaving the room in pitch blackness.

In the dark the sounds from outside became magnified in volume and it seemed as though all the fiends of hell were raging in a carnival of blood lust out in that courtyard. But the general's words rose above the clamor.

"Hartner," asked the reverberant voice, "did you ever see Milly again?"

The shadows seemed to pause and gather in upon themselves and the very walls of the room to contract as those men in the darkness waited for the reply.

"Yes," came Colonel Hartner's voice out of the void. "I saw her again."

"Where?" boomed Master's deep tones.

"I saw her just before young Brodney was killed. Milly was—Milly did not turn out—Frisco Kate—" the colonel's voice died away to a whisper.

Somewhere in the room there was the sound of a sharply indrawn breath.

"But—my God! Then young Brodney was . . ."

"My son," came Colonel Hartner's voice.

There followed a stunned silence and then Masiter's voice again, this time with some reedy quality to it that it had not shown before:

"But how—what—who brought him up . . ."

"In divorcing Milly I let her take the action with the agreement that our son should be brought up by a third party. She gave him his stepfather's name. I furnished the funds for his education."

What would have been said further, if anything, none of them knew for there came a tramp of feet in the corridor, which drew every one's attention from the drama that had been unfolded in their midst. There was a sound of certainty and a definite note to the tramp of those boots that marked them as different from the previous shambling footsteps in the corridor. They tramped along in business-like fashion and halted outside the door. In the darkness inside the room the strained and watchful officers saw a bar of light appear along the threshold. Some one tried a key in the lock and then a second key; finally a third key clicked and the door swung open, showing lanternlight gleaming on steel bayonets above the dark bulk of many shaggy men. In front of the men stood a slender figure of a man clad in rough Norfolk jacket and riding breeches and boots, a heavy Luger swung at his waist. He peered into the room as the rays of the lantern stabbed into the darkness.

None of the officers at the table, or the older, heavier man sitting against the wall, moved or stirred. It was only when a second figure joined that of the slightly built man that Benny Collins shifted on his seat and blinked his eyes as he recognized the face of the Hungarian officer whose life he and Colonel Hartner had saved at Khabarovsk.

The Hungarian said something in Russian to the man in the Norfolk jacket and the two of them entered the room, every detail of which was lighted up by the rays of the lantern. Behind them the guards crowded in the doorway star-

ing vacantly at the "bourgeois" officers.

The Hungarian halted when he reached the end of the table.

"I have come to inform you—" he spoke very formally addressing himself to Colonel Hartner—"that I have been successful in interceding with the commander of the Communist forces and he has sent one of his Kommissars—" he nodded briefly to the man in the Norfolk jacket—"to see that you and you and you—" here he nodded to the French officer, to Captain Scripps-Batesby, to Captain Townsend and to Major Collins—"are set free immediately and escorted in safety to the station where you will be put aboard the train and given safe conduct back to your own forces."

The officers addressed digested this in silence, not noting the omission of one of their number until a heavy voice behind them boomed out:

"And how about me?" came General Masiter's voice confidently, as he rose and tightened his belt preparatory to setting forth.

The Hungarian's face became a graven mask.

"My permission does not extend to you, General," he said quietly. "I believe that the Kommissar has been ordered to make an example of you."

"What's that you say?" The general stared, astounded, until the realization of the full meaning of the words dawned upon him; his jaw sagged open as he stared at that grim row of bayonets filling the doorway.

Before he had a chance to speak again the suave voice of the Hungarian fell on his ears:

"What the Kommissar chooses to do with you is his affair, the affair of the duly constituted Russian authorities. It is none of my business!"

Those words struck a responsive chord in Benny Collins' memory, and suddenly he recalled that they were the selfsame words uttered by the general at the time the Hungarian was about to be executed. But the Hungarian was now addressing

Colonel Hartner again.

"If you are ready, gentlemen, we will go," he said.

The British officer rose with the Canadian. The French officer was already on his feet. Benny Collins started to rise and then sank back as Colonel Hartner's clear, incisive voice made response:

"But we're not ready to go, my friend," he said flatly. "If it is so simple a matter for you to save some of us it is just as simple a matter to save all of us. What the other officers intend doing is their own affair. But as long as General Masiter stays here a prisoner I remain also."

The other officers stood uncertainly for a space. It was the Britisher who spoke up at last.

"It's awfully sporting of you, Colonel, and all that sort of thing, but you'll pardon me if I show no enthusiasm about becoming a martyr for the sake of that blighter over there." He nodded toward General Masiter.

"And that goes for me too," echoed the Canadian.

The two of them moved toward the door. The French officer gazed from Colonel Hartner to the general, then with a shake of his head and an indescribable gesture compounded of lifted shoulders and upflung hands he followed the other two. Benny Collins looked after them wistfully and then sat down with something like a sigh.

"Go on with them, Collins," said Colonel Hartner sharply. "That's an order, not a request, mind you! On your way!" Benny Collins followed along, joining the other three at the door.

"But, Colonel—" the Hungarian raised his hands expostulatingly—"it is ridiculous for you to lose your life for that—pardon me for saying so—but that extremely unsympathetic type of man who is your general. Why lose your life for him, Colonel? For lose it you will. The minute I am gone they will shoot you

both down here in this cell. They must have a little blood and the general is the sacrifice. Don't throw away your life, Colonel, I beg of you!"

"It's my life, isn't it?" returned Colonel Hartner irritably.

"You are determined upon this course, Colonel?"

"Absolutely," growled the colonel.

"I salute you as a brave man, Colonel," said the Hungarian, drawing himself up grandiloquently, "although I should chide you for being a very foolish one."

And with that the Hungarian saluted and, turning about, strode to the door where the Kommissar now stood like a huntsman holding back the hounds. Here there ensued a long colloquy that ended at last in the Kommissar's acquiescence given very grudgingly. The Hungarian returned.

"It is then arranged, my Colonel," he said. "Seeing that you have saved my life, I can do no less than release your general, although—" he shrugged judicially—"I am not enthusiastic . . ."

And so it was that the general shambled out in the rear of the group of officers.

It was on the train headed for Khabarovsk that the general came into the compartment where Colonel Hartner sat with the rest of the recent captives.

"Hartner—" the general's voice quavered a little—"I've been pretty badly mistaken about you. Is it too late for me to ask you if I may have that drink now?" He held out his hand in a gesture of amity.

Colonel Hartner gazed at the hand without seeming to see either it or General Masiter. Then, his eyebrows raised ever so slightly, he turned to Captain Scripps-Batesby—

"As I was saying," he continued, "I think your Gurkas must be very similar in fighting ability to our Moro Constabulary . . ."

A Complete Novelette of



CHAPTER I

A MYSTERIOUS MISSIVE

UP AND down the iron stairs of the big garment factory I made my way, punching the station boxes at the end of each corridor, sniffing for fire, on the lookout for thieves, but with my thoughts far removed from the drab and simple duties of a night watchman.

Machines clicked and hummed on the fourth floor where a few operators were turning out some belated Fall and Winter samples. Night sounds of New York filtered in through screen and shaft, also acrid gases from motor exhausts of cab and bus, to blend with the reek of sponged cloth and scraps of fur.

But as I made this first round I moved in fancy in another world. Local sounds and odors, by the magic of a letter in my pocket, were transmuted strangely. The keen air of the Far North tingled in my nostrils. The hum of sewing machines and rumble of traffic became the song of the night wind sifting through taut shrouds, the clatter of cable passing up the hawse hole. Mechanically I jabbed my key into the last box and entered the outer office where I rested between the hourly rounds. Then, for the third time, I read the letter which had reached me just before coming on duty.

"We are looking for an honest and fearless man who knows small craft and the sea" [it began]. "We need a fellow

the Hudson Bay Country



An ERRAND *to the* BARRENS

By
STEPHEN
ALLEN
REYNOLDS

who can live hard and, if necessary, shoot straight. And, judging by a recent Sunday newspaper article, we believe you might suit. We are ignorant of your city address, so are writing you in care of the War Department. Should you still need employment, it is possible you might like to undertake a mission which will send you into Northern waters. I am not at liberty to give you details other than that the errand will take you to the Barren Lands near the head of Hudson Bay, that you will have an unscrupulous rival, and that your reward in the event of success will approximate the sum of \$20,000. It is only fair to warn you that from mid-June until early October your life will be in almost daily peril, and that should

you return safe but empty handed, it will be impossible to pay you wages for the time devoted.

"Please give the foregoing your consideration. We shall expect to hear from you not later than June 5th, time being an important factor, and if we do not we shall assume either that this letter has failed to reach you, or that through the newspaper publicity given to you and other deserving veterans of the World War you have found lucrative employment which you would hesitate to abandon for temporary and dangerous work at no stipulated wage.

"If interested, and provided the time limit has not expired, telegraph the undersigned at Noank, Connecticut, where-upon railroad fare and instructions will be forwarded to you."

From the neatly penned signature, "Horatio Thurston", my eyes leaped to the calendar hanging beside the time clock. On my first reading of the letter I had reasoned that I was well within the time limit, and my glance at the calendar now confirmed the calculation. This was the evening of June 2nd. There were as yet three days of grace. Curiously I examined the superscription and stampings on the envelop which had taken a fortnight to reach me from nearby Connecticut. The War Department had apparently no record of my address, and so had passed the buck to Veterans' Administration—with happy result.

Joyously I mulled over the situation. I knew where the little fishing and lobstering town of Noank lay, and estimated it a three-hour ride from Grand Central Terminal. I would telegraph this Horatio Thurston. By going without sleep for a day I could make it there and back—back in ample time to punch station boxes. But perhaps I wouldn't have to come back! The thought thrilled me. If I wired early enough they could pick out another watchman at one of the crowded agencies along Sixth Avenue. How I hoped I wouldn't have to return! How I wished I could quit the necessary but distasteful job that very moment!

The mere lighting of a cigaret came to make it possible.

It was strictly against the rules for the night watchman to smoke while on duty, and this point had been stressed by the junior partner who had hired me the day before. Now, of all persons on earth, who was to walk into the office and catch me in the act of lighting up, but that same junior partner?

"We won't be needing you any more after tonight," he snapped, scowling.

Instantly I came to earth. I knew I was in the wrong.

"I'm sorry," I said, crushing the fire out of the cigaret, "but I was thinking of something else. I didn't—"

"That's all right," the garment man cut in acidly. "After tomorrow you'll have plenty of time to think and smoke—on a park bench with the other bums."

That observation altered matters. It got my goat, of course; but in reality I was pleased. It took me but a second to shed my watchman's badge and plank the keys and flashlight on the table; then I grinned at the junior partner.

"If you can't get a man by phone," I told him, "you can stay here and punch your own boxes. I'm on my way."



I LEFT the boss open mouthed, too surprised I suppose to offer further insult, and with my thoughts on the possibility of an evening train for Noank, I hastened to the nearest subway station.

At the Grand Central I found there'd be a train out in less than an hour. Noank would be reached at 10:10—somewhat late for a business or social call. Nevertheless I bought my ticket and hustled over to the little room on Lexington Avenue which had been my home for many unprofitable weeks. It took me less than five minutes to pack a suitcase with all my worldly belongings, another three minutes to hold a brief parley with a mildly astonished landlady, and then I hurried back through the theater crowds and ducked into the terminal.

About the time I would have been due to make the third round of the garment plant, I was somewhere between Rye and Mamaroneck, rattling along to the eastward while wondering what lay ahead.

Would I suit this Mr. Horatio Thurston? And if so, what did they expect me to fetch out of the Far North "near the head of Hudson Bay"? And aside

from Arctic ice and the perils of navigation in unfriendly waters, what dangers would I be called upon to face? These and many other questions occurred to me as I sat in the smoker and stared out over the dark waters of Long Island Sound.

Again and again I read over the letter which had reached me in such a round-about fashion, and wondered how my services could possibly be worth "approximately \$20,000". Perhaps an extra cipher had been slipped in by error, I mused, and then laughed quietly to myself as I realized the futility of attempting to solve this mystery before seeing Horatio Thurston. At any rate, I reflected, there'd be thrills a-plenty—and no punching of time clocks or station boxes. Almost anything was better than that.

Right on the dot we pulled into Noank, just east of New London, and the station master answered a question or two while locking up for the night. I could get a bed at the Ashby House, a three-minute walk distant. *Professor* Horatio Thurston lived on the shore road to the lighthouse. It was the third white cottage beyond the shipyard. I thanked the railroad man and passed on along the unpaved road.

The Ashby place was more boarding house than hotel. A pleasant faced woman turned from watching the end of a checker game to answer my knock on the screen door of what appeared to be the general sitting room, and shortly I was shown to a chamber on the next floor. There I washed up, brushed my clothes and went downstairs. The checker players had left and the landlady was turning out some of the lights.

"I'm taking a little walk before turning in," I told her. "Will I need a key?"

"The front door's always open," she said, and stopped her tidying long enough to look me over with polite curiosity.

I lingered for a moment or two, tempted to ask questions about Horatio

Thurston, who it seemed was a professor of something or other; but on second thought, I bade the woman good night and set out to find the white cottage on the lighthouse road.

It was no trick to spot the lighthouse. It stood isolated on a small point overlooking the Sound. Nearer at hand shadowy structures close to the waterfront indicated what would be the shipyard. Noank inhabitants numbered quite a few retired sea captains, I told myself as I passed trim cottages and shell bordered walks. White flagpoles pointed aloft at the starry sky.

The soft night air, hitherto fragrant with blooming roses, now held the tang of salt water. Just beyond the shipyard I began to count the cottages, and presently stood before the white picket fence of the third one. The house itself was dark, but a dim light gleamed among the vines of the front porch, and I thought I heard low pitched voices.

As I stood peering through the pale moonlight a big dog came bounding down the path, to bark at me through the pickets of the gate. It was a dutiful rather than a vicious barking, and at a word from me the animal calmed and proceeded to sniff in friendly curiosity.

"Who's there?" came sharply from the shadows of the porch.

I had had no intention of disturbing any one at this late hour, but there was no choice but to answer—

"I'm looking for the cottage of Horatio Thurston."

A deeper voice now challenged me.

"Who are you?" it rumbled.

"I'm Bucklyn Treat," I answered. "Just out from New York."

I had no chance to say more, to explain why I was prowling around, for scarcely had I uttered my name before an elderly man came quickly down the walk and grabbed both my hands.

"I'm Horatio Thurston," he said, letting go one of my hands so he could swing the gate open. "Come in and meet Captain Boomer."



HALF leading, half dragging me, Professor Thurston started up the path, and soon I was bending over the chair of Captain Ezra Boomer, a gaunt and bony mariner well over sixty. I noticed that he didn't get up when the professor introduced us, and that he offered me his left hand. But his first words cleared up these points.

"Excuse my left paw," he said in the deep voice I had first heard while at the gate. "Ain't got much power left in the right side these days."

He peered up at me in the semi-darkness, for the dim porch bulb served but to replace the moonlight the vines shut out. A silence followed. I felt the tail of the big Newfoundland tapping rhythmically against my leg. The moment was at hand for me to explain.

"I hadn't intended seeing you before morning," I said. "Your letter reached me in New York but a few hours ago. I pulled out right away. Before I went to bed at the Ashby House I thought I'd take a little walk and get my bearings. And so here I am. You'll have to blame the dog."

An approving chuckle came from the chair.

"Couldn't have turned out better," the professor said. "We were just talking about you—wondering if you'd show up in time."

"Let's go inside where we can view each other," the captain proposed.

As he stirred to sit erect and gain his feet, I stepped closer to him. But the professor drew me aside. I wondered at this, but once inside a long, low room with book lined walls, my host explained.

"Captain Ezra's very sensitive about his weakness—can't bear to be helped. So far, with a cane, he manages fairly well."

The captain clumped in and sank into a chair. The professor switched on extra lights, and now we could see each other to better advantage. Horatio Thurston was a mild mannered old fel-

low of spare build and with white side whiskers. Benevolent blue eyes surveyed me through gold rimmed spectacles. I liked him at first sight.

I turned to look at the captain. He was staring at me from beneath the bushiest pair of eyebrows I had ever seen. A powerful man, even yet, the big frame of him filled the chair and seemed to overflow at the sides where his muscular arms and knotted fists rested. Above his loose collar, in the mode of a bygone generation, a fringe of iron-gray beard framed the lower part of a face saddle-brown and crinkled by sun and storm.

"I s'pose," he said, as our eyes met, "we'd best leave off tellin' you about our proposition till we know more about you."

I nodded. I must have patience.

"We'll grant that you're not a coward, and that you're honest," the captain went on to say. "That newspaper yarn about your medals settles the first item. The eyes in my head settles the other. What we want to know is whether you can handle sailin' craft. That newspaper yarn spoke of you as bein' a yacht sailor by trade. Is that so?"

Swallowing my recollections of the garbled and exaggerated feature run some weeks before under the caption "Shall Our Heroes Starve?" I confessed that I was no sailor by trade. For several Summers, I explained, I had worked on yachts. And failing other employment I had spent the best part of four Winters on coasting schooners. Now there seemed to be nothing doing at sea.

"I know quite a bit about fore-and-afters," I concluded, "and I know the coast fairly well from Frenchman's Bay to Sandy Hook."

"Can you use a sextant?" the captain shot at me.

I shook my head.

"I didn't get that far with navigation," I had to admit, "but I understand dead reckoning and chart reading. Charts have always fascinated me. I'm

familiar with most of the Atlantic Coast sheets, and know how to use 'em."

Quickly Captain Boomer checked me on this claim.

"S'pose you were runnin' into New York harbor without a pilot; what charts would you like to have after hittin' Ambrose Channel?"

This was absurdly easy.

"Twelve-fifteen of the Coast and Geodetic would do," I answered. "Three sixty-nine might be preferred by some on account of the larger scale."

"What body of water is that behind you, out over Noank Light?"

"Fishers' Island Sound."

"And what lightship rides yonder about four mile out?"

The question was hardly fair. The bulk of coast traffic passing Fishers' Island on its Long Island side, the average coast seaman might be forgiven for not knowing about the Ram Island light vessel moored on the side toward the Connecticut shore. But it so chanced I had put in a Summer bony fishing out of Stonington. I answered correctly, resisting the temptation to add that the lightship's skipper was a Swede by the name of Holmgren.



THE captain seemed impressed. During the pause which followed, I stole a glance at the professor. He was beaming at me. But Captain Boomer was by no means through with his examination.

"Your health is good, I take it?"

"Splendid."

"And you can handle firearms and hit what you aim at?"

"I'm no marksman," I answered, "but I'm a fair shot with either rifle or pistol."

"Practise makes perfect," the captain observed.

For a long minute he eyed me in silent appraisal, and then it occurred to him that he hadn't qualified me as to practical seamanship.

"One more little question," he

growled, provoked that he had almost forgotten this quite important point.

With his face turned to the ceiling, he closed his eyes and thought out a test quiz.

"We'll assume," he said presently, "that you're aboard an eighteen-ton sloop, anchored just out o' the fairway. There's enough tide settin' in to keep the wind over your stern. You want to get under way. Will you hoist your mains'l before breakin' out your hook?"

"No," I answered. "If you do that your boat sails ahead over the anchor and charges about all over the shop. Not unless the wind's for'ard of the beam should you hoist mains'l."

The reply seemed to nettles the captain rather than please him. As if he were determined to stick me on at least one point, he propounded still another question.

"You're on the port tack," he said. "There's shallow water to starboard. You miss stays when you try to go about. What are you goin' to do?"

This wasn't so easy. I gave the matter a moment or two of thought.

"It would depend how close in the shallow water was," I said at length. "I could give her a good full and try for stays again, but if she missed the second time we might go aground. It would be safer to wear around and jibe."

The captain's mien softened. Slowly now he shook his grizzled head from side to side, and addressed himself to the professor.

"I can't find a mite o' fault with this Mr. Bucklyn Treat," he said. "S'pose you tell him our story."

Grave and thoughtful, the professor finished the polishing of his spectacles, then surveyed me through them.

"I have a question of my own to put," he said in a low tone.

Impatient, but fighting against showing visible signs of it, I waited and listened.

"Are you married?"

"No, sir."

"Mother living?"

"I think I know what you're getting at," I ventured. "The only relatives I have are some cousins out in California. I've never laid eyes on 'em. If I shouldn't come back from this trip North, nobody'd miss me. And now might I ask what you expect of me, and how I can possibly earn twenty thousand dollars in a few months?"

"Tell him," the captain ordered almost gruffly.

Professor Thurston, in his own way, went about the telling. With what seemed an exasperating degree of deliberation, he rose and approached a desk which stood in the far corner of the room. From a drawer he took a tin box and stepped to my side.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked as he flipped open the cover of the box before handing it to me.

My first impression was that I was looking at some vari-colored lumps of candy of the gumdrop order, flung loosely into a box which had once held a hundred cigarets. I picked up one of the grayish pieces and found it surprisingly light—too light to be a precious stone in the rough. About as big as the ball of my thumb, like wax to the touch, this piece of opaque material was unknown to me.

"That particular fragment you are holding," Professor Thurston volunteered, "is worth more than its weight in fine gold. The darker lumps are worth approximately ten dollars an ounce."

Surprising information. Still I was in the dark. A chuckle from the captain induced me to glance in his direction. He was stuffing tobacco into the bowl of a curved stem briar, while grinning and enjoying my mystification.

"Smell it," he suggested.

I lifted the box and sniffed. A faint and pungent odor not particularly agreeable was perceptible. I lowered the box, guessing, speculating, and as the doubtful fragrance lingered in my nostrils the answer flashed upon me. It

was that rare and precious substance cast up by the sea. Perfumers use it in the making of their more expensive scents.

"Ambergris?" I ventured, and was rewarded by a nod from the smiling professor.

"Manufactured in the innards of a sick sperm whale," the captain commented between smacks at his pipe.

I knew very little about whales and their ways, yet somewhere in my storehouse of knowledge was the belief that sperm whales were always found in warm waters. Hudson Bay was sub-Arctic. Professor Thurston's next words cleared up this point.

"Ambergris," he said, "has never been found in whales other than the cachalot species—the sperm. Hudson Bay being the home of the bowhead, I thought I had a new fact for zoologists when I stumbled over this treasure last Summer. But the subsequent finding of fragments of the skeleton of a huge cachalot set me straight. And still later, in the skin *tupeks* of the natives at Whale Point, I learned something of the history of this freak whale, and was shown pointed teeth chopped out of its lower jaw. With all the evidence at hand, I've reconstructed the last movements of this mammal which sickened and died in strange waters.

"It's guesswork, of course, but probable. The whale was cruising along in the Gulf Stream off the coast of Newfoundland, gorging itself with giant squid taken at great depths. Some of the tentacles are as big around as your body at the waist, and here and there are suckers the size of a saucer, bordered with needle pointed beaks shaped much like the claws of a tiger. The whale, surfeited, became afflicted with indigestion. In pain and off guard as it were, it left the warm waters of the Gulf Stream and nosed along the Labrador coast until it came to Hudson Strait. Up the Strait it slipped past berg and floe, and in a dying flurry crossed the Bay and drove ashore be-

tween Whale Point and the mouth of Wager River.

"Natives found the carcass, stripped it of blubber and meat and left the remainder for the bears and wolves. Fortunately for us, neither animals nor birds of prey will touch ambergris. It's too pungent in flavor for them. And the Eskimos, ignorant of its value, despised the gummy mass found in the entrails of their prize.

"Snows of Winter covered it until June of last year. Tides washed some of it away. A part of this latter was cast up on the beaches at places a dozen miles distant from the skeleton. In fact it was at a remote point where I found in the rockweed and kelp at the high-water mark the first lump of ambergris and identified it as such. It was a twenty-pound piece, worth I daresay fully five thousand dollars. And not five paces away I saw another fragment—"

"Hadn't you better go back to the wreck o' the *Roamer*?" Captain Boomer broke in. "Otherwise how'll you make it clear about Martin Kelsey and his rascally doin's?"

"Maybe I had," the professor answered mildly.

A pause followed during which he collected his thoughts; a preliminary stroking of the Newfoundland's ear; and then he looked over at me and began the story of the last voyage of the ill fated *Roamer*.

CHAPTER II

FROZEN TREASURE

"IT WAS in June last," the scholar began, "that a select party of us set out under mixed auspices for certain investigations at the Magnetic Pole in Boothia Land, just north of Hudson Bay. Dr. Yates of Massachusetts Tech was nominally in command, and was to make magnetic and electrical experiments. Zoology was covered by a Smithsonian representative. Other

branches of science were in competent hands. It's needless to give you names and titles.

"As for me, I was taking care of that branch of zoology known as ornithology—birds. Captain Ezra Boomer, for many years a whaler familiar with Arctic waters, was our sailing master, and in no degree responsible for the tragedy that overwhelmed us."

"Thanks for the kind words," the captain growled in tones barely audible.

"We were seventeen souls aboard the bark *Roamer*," the professor continued, "when we sailed out of New Bedford provisioned for two years and fully equipped with almost everything money could buy. There's no need of going into details about the crew. I'll speak only of Bosun Martin Kelsey, our present rival and sworn enemy. He's the fellow we'd like to have you triumph over—that is in case you care to undertake the job after you've heard me through."

"Go ahead, Professor," I said as the scientist paused, perhaps for an encouraging word from me. "It was only a question of my filling your bill," I added, "for I was with you from the moment I read your letter."

An inarticulate mutter of approval came through the fog of tobacco smoke enveloping the captain. The professor brightened at my words. And then, as memories of tragedy and death crowded hard upon him, sorrow stole over his kindly features. A few moments of brooding, during which he was obviously groping for suitable words, and he resumed his story.

"I'll pass over our voyage through Hudson Strait. There was more than the usual amount of ice, but we met with no mishap. In the northwest corner of Hudson Bay is Repulse Bay. It was there we expected to go into Winter quarters. The trip to Boothia Land was to be made by sled after the first snow had fallen. We had the latest type of motor sledges. But we never got to use them.

"On the night of the twelfth of August Bosun Kelsey was in charge of the middle watch. We were in the strait known as Sir Thomas Roe's Welcome. Repulse Bay was within striking distance. Heavy ice appeared ahead. Instead of waking Captain Boomer, the bosun altered the course. He found what he thought was a wide rift and headed into it. He didn't know that the ice on the port hand was grounded. He knew little about the set of the current.

"The ice on the starboard hand closed in suddenly. It nipped the *Roamer* and swung her around. Her canvas slatted in the wind. Her collapsing hull screamed like a living thing in torment. The deck humped as the awful pressure increased. The cross timbers crumpled. One terrific grinding crash, and all below the maindeck perished. Men were trapped in their bunks, it happened so quickly. I was thrown out of my berth at the first lurch. I scrambled to the deck. Then I was thrown bodily out upon the grounded ice. I—I don't quite recollect—"

The faltering tones of the professor died away. Oversensitive, he couldn't bear to relate what he had next seen, and what he had experienced before morning came. Captain Ezra spared him the difficult task.

"I'd turned in all dressed and with my boots on," he said, leaning forward in his chair. "I was ready for a sudden call, but all the call I got was to be stood on my head and hear spilled canvas a-thunderin'. I climbed up the companionway to take charge, but there was nothin' to take charge of. The air was full of whistlin' sheets and crashin' blocks. Then the big crunch came and I was flung out on the ice to port. I saw men slippin' over the rail on the far side and heard 'em callin' to one another. 'Twas too dark to see who they were. They were on the free floe ice and drifted away. Never heard from 'em again.

"The very minute that ice commenced

to move, what was left of the *Roamer* started settlin'. I had just time to grab my sheath knife and hack through the gripes and falls of a whaleboat hangin' in davits close to the ice, when the deck and top hamper sank in the openin' lead. There was a bubblin' an' a gurglin' and then a crack like a gun when the wind whipped the main-royal out of its gaskets. It bellied up in one final slap. Then it was sucked under.

"It was quieter now—too quiet. For we could hear the cries of the injured and drownin'. I found I had two men with me, and made shift to get the whaleboat afloat. It was too dark to do much, but we paddled around and pulled some poor devils out o' the water—only to bury 'em in the mornin', off the grounded ice. When it got light enough to see, we counted noses. We were four left alive: the professor and myself, Bosun Kelsey, and a sailor with a broken leg.

"Now we're gettin' closer to our ambergris, and the deviltry of Kelsey. S'pose you go on with the yarn, Professor. I can't smoke and talk."



CAPTAIN Ezra settled back, fishing for his knife and tobacco, whereupon the professor took up the thread of the story again.

"When daylight came," he resumed, "there wasn't a sign of the *Roamer*, or of the men who had drifted away on the loose ice. The fairly strong current which flows southward through Roe's Welcome had borne them beyond our help, for the whaleboat had no sail and was insufficiently oared. Fortunately for us, however, the boat held the usual two emergency kegs: One of water, one of biscuits and small necessities.

"We put the leg of the injured man in splints fashioned from the staves of one of the kegs. Then we set out for the shore, a distance of about a mile. Here we witnessed one of nature's phenomena, for just beyond the kelp cluttered beach the Barrens lay smiling in

the full bloom of late Summer. There wasn't a patch of snow in sight. Grouse and curlew were feasting on wild currants and raspberries. Behind us was the ice sprinkled Welcome, with here and there a berg rearing its blue head. Beneath our feet, under the thin blanket of soil and moss, lay the eternal ice of the tundra. Yet before our very faces butterflies were floating among the wildflowers, and yellow rumped warblers were—"

"Not forgettin' the giant skeeters and swarms o' black flies," the captain broke in with gentle sarcasm.

The interruption pleased me, for it served to shorten the professor's little discourse on birds and scenery, which, although of passing interest, was less vital than more particulars about Boat-swain Kelsey, and just what was expected of me.

"I daresay I was straying from the main theme," the professor admitted with characteristic mildness. "Therefore I'll shorten my narrative," he continued smilingly, "even to the point of omitting description of the Diptera the captain has mentioned. As I was saying, we landed on the edge of the treeless Barrens, and just below the mouth of the Wager River. Captain Boomer recognized several landmarks. The nearest natives, he thought, would be found at Whale Point, a two-day journey down the coast. And so we set off, managing to keep two oars in action.

"Progress with such a heavy boat was slow and laborious. We put into the beach at noon to boil a pot of tea, and it was then I found and identified the first lump of ambergris. The second fragment, as I've remarked, was not far away. I was more puzzled than excited. I told my companions of the find and ventured the opinion that more of the precious substance might be found—if indeed not the carcass of its source—by means of a systematic search."

"The reactions of the two men were different. The injured sailor was suf-

fering too much to realize that I had stumbled upon what might be a small fortune for each of us. Captain Boomer protested that by right of discovery the two lumps belonged to me personally. Bosun Kelsey, a gleam of cupidity in his eyes, had little to say; but later, after we had sent natives up and down the coast and had accumulated fully three hundred pounds of the treasure, he was of the opinion that we should divide the proceeds three ways, leaving the sailor out.

"This fellow with the broken leg, Kelsey reasoned, had contributed neither to the finding nor gathering of the ambergris. Why should he be considered? He was only an ignorant Finn; a burden and a problem on our hands. Later, in view of certain happenings, Bosun Kelsey reasoned that the ambergris belongs to the first man who can reach the cache and fetch it back from Hudson Bay. And he's quite certain that he'll be that man. Even now he's preparing to sail from Provincetown aboard the fishing schooner *Quickstep*. But I fear I'm getting ahead of my story. It's better that you have a chronological background of the situation."

The professor ceased speaking long enough to gather his thoughts and determine what I should be told. The silence was but a few seconds in duration, but in that short period I calculated that three hundred pounds of ambergris at fifteen to twenty dollars an ounce totaled something like a hundred thousand dollars. A handsome sum! And there would be a race for it—most likely a fight. My heart quickened at the thought—not particularly at the prospect of a fight, for I was war weary. Yet, footloose and jobless as I was, it would be a keen pleasure to do battle for these two good people. Life, after all, was sweet indeed.

I looked over at Captain Ezra. He was half reclining in his chair, his eyes closed while he puffed gently at his pipe. The light on his upturned face disclosed features at first glance stern

and dour; but as I continued to gaze I noted the sunbursts of kindly crinkles around the closed eyes, the cleanly shaven lips which could have belonged to none other than a generous man of fine caliber. I fancied I recognized the type. Lovable old sea dog was Captain Ezra Boomer. His gruffness was a pose—a mere shell of poop-deck armor worn carelessly ashore.

But here my observations and reflections were cut short. Professor Thurston had begun relating what happened to the survivors from the *Roamer* after the finding of the ambergris.



"THERE was no time for an extensive search," he said, "but we covered approximately a mile of beach and found another fragment of treasure, smaller than the first two, yet worth more than the average diamond worn by women of wealth. We drank our tea and rowed away. But now we kept as close to the beach as possible, and with a sharp lookout for a stranded carcass.

"We saw no carcass, but next forenoon we sighted some huge bones which once had formed part of the skeleton of a mammoth cachalot. The shore ice of the previous Winter, broken in turn by tide and storm, had chewed and dismembered the framework. Many of the smaller bones were missing. We noted signs of human handiwork where teeth had been chopped out of the lower jaw. And what is of more importance, we collected at and around this spot more than a hundred pounds of ambergris. One piece, worth perhaps eight thousand dollars, was discovered floating in the water.

"With this treasure, already amounting to a comfortable fortune, we reached Whale Point and found some families of Eskimos Captain Boomer had wintered among in former years. Unfortunately, they were in a pitiable plight. Sickness, a shortage of ammunition and a severe Winter had cut down their numbers. The usual enormous herds

of walrus, their mainstay for food, had failed to appear during the Summer. But, weak and half starved as they were, they welcomed us and erected a skin *tupek* for our shelter.

"Now commenced a period of suffering. On the very night of our arrival an extra high tide and an offshore wind swept away not only our whaleboat, but practically every native *kyack*. Luckily we had removed the ambergris and remainder of our stores to our tent. There was a slim chance that the boat and some of the *kyacks* might drift ashore on our side of the bay, and to that end the most active members of our little community searched up and down the coast for more than a fortnight.

"Ambergris was found and brought in, but not a boat seen. Days passed and the last biscuit was divided between a sick woman and her small child. We joined the natives in snaring grouse and picking berries. That was all very well until most of the birds migrated and frost nipped the last of the berries. We were now reduced to making chowder from barnacles knocked off the rocks—from whelks and spider crabs.

"We could look for no relief until ice should form. Then salmon-trout could be taken at the mouth of a nearby stream and seals stalked and speared on the salt water ice. Later, when sufficient snow had fallen and packed, we could make the four hundred mile sled journey to Fort Churchill, the nearest Hudson's Bay Company's post. But Winter came on slowly. It was mid-October before we took our first salmon-trout. And in the meantime—"

The professor stopped. An expression of disgust was written plainly on his features. I saw him glance uneasily at Captain Ezra.

"He's still finicky about the fried dog," the latter explained while smiling grimly. "We had to eat several of 'em before we could get fish. We kidded him along that he was eatin' seal, till one day he saw the skins."

"An almost unpardonable deception," the professor commented, and then proceeded:

"The snows came. We built igloos and moved from the *tupeks*. The streams and coves now froze over and fish spearing through the ice began in earnest.

Seal and walrus were still scarce, and the caribou herds were moving southward toward the timberline. We were all living on fish now, and it was difficult to lay aside enough to provision us for the dash to Fort Churchill and civilization.

"Early in November a few seal were taken and we began to accumulate a surplus of fish. But Thanksgiving Day arrived before we had sufficient for two dog teams, and that was the minimum fixed upon. Food and furs on one sled; the sailor with the stiff and swollen leg on the other. The rest of us had to go on foot.

"It was physically impossible for us to take along the bulky ambergris, for even had we the food for an extra team, there weren't dogs enough left to harness to a third sled.

"Bosun Kelsey proposed leaving the sailor behind; but that, of course, was out of the question. So we headed up the ambergris in some old oil casks abandoned by whalers years before, and set out for Fort Churchill. Concerning the hardships of the journey I'll touch only on a point or two. A late storm had broken up the young ice in Chesterfield Inlet, and before we could cross that body of water we were forced to build an igloo and wait there for nine days.

"Faced with a shortage of food, we put aside a few fish for the dogs and divided the rest. It was on the sixth night, as I recollect, that Captain Boomer caught Kelsey stealing rations belonging to the sailor, and a count of the frozen salmon-trout apportioned to the dogs showed that the animals had been robbed.

"A fight followed."



"AND I got the worst of it," Captain Ezra supplemented. Angrily he continued, "The dog robbin' swab nearly beat the head off me. He got me down and was kickin' the tar out o' me when the professor nabbed his ankle. He turned on the professor then, and got in a wallop. He was all set for the second when Tukpeetwah dashed in and knocked him cold with the butt of a seal spear."

"Tukpeetwah, I presume, was your native driver," I said as my two companions were lost in grim retrospection.

"He was *one* of 'em," the captain enlightened me without looking up from the clenched fist which moved back and forth on the chair arm. "We had two Eskimos along—the best dog drivers from Whale Point. We promised 'em ammunition and supplies at Fort Churchill. And we kept our word."

Again the captain relapsed into a moody silence, and once more the professor assumed the burden of the narrative.

"Eventually we reached Fort Churchill, frost bitten and half starved. Up to the moment of our arrival we kept the bosun virtually a prisoner. He was now our sworn enemy. But on one point we all agreed, and that was to say nothing to any one about the ambergris. It was ours—there was no question about that. We had found it, gathered and stored it. But here other factors entered.

"Captain Ezra thought that certain rulings of the British Admiralty relating to goods or materials cast up by the sea would apply to our whale and its product. And he had heard of a treasure trove act in force, under the terms of which we might forfeit to the Crown or Dominion the lion's share of our find. And again, were it to become public knowledge, the cache might be robbed. And so silence was preserved.

"There remains little more for me to tell. Factor Macnamara honored my draft. We loaded the sleds of our Es-

kimo friends with all the supplies and ammunition they could manage. We had to wait five days for the weekly train. It was during that period we learned that we were the sole survivors of the wreck of the *Roamer*, and indeed, the first to break the news of the disaster.

"We reached home—Noank—on Christmas Eve. Samples of the ambergris sent to Beauregard Frères, at Grasse, France, have been reported on favorably. This perfume manufacturing firm, perhaps the largest in the world, is eager to take all we can provide. It remains only for us to fetch the ambergris from Whale Point—easier planned than done. You now have the main facts about the loss of the *Roamer* and the finding of the ambergris. Is it all clear so far?"

"It's clear enough up to the point of your plan," I admitted. "But as you've been looking for a man familiar with handling small craft, I suppose you're sending a boat up. Why not a seaplane?"

My companions exchanged smiles.

"We considered that and dismissed it, months ago," Professor Thurston went on to explain. "Competent aviators quoted prohibitive prices. The chief difficulty, it seems, lies in navigation. So close is this territory to the Magnetic Pole, the compass is practically useless. The dip of the needle is too great. The frequent fogs, the Summer haze and mirage over the sodden tundra preclude an exact survey from above. Insofar as planes are concerned, this region is forbidden territory. One of our greatest aviators told us he'd rather fly to the North Pole and back than attempt our errand. And so we decided upon the water route. Hudson Strait opens early in July."

"It seems a rather large order for me," I mused aloud. "If the navigation is so difficult, I don't see that I'd be particularly valuable in such strange waters. I wouldn't know Whale Point from Sandy Hook. I've never cruised

in the ice. I don't know ice. It isn't—"

"But I know ice," the captain broke in gruffly. "Young ice, old ice, mush ice; blue ice from Fox Channel, bergs bigger'n Washington Capitol, floes bigger'n this State o' Connecticut. And I'm goin' with you. We'll buck the ice together—you and me and Matt."

For the time being I masked my astonishment that a man partly crippled would attempt such a voyage.

"Who is Matt?" I asked, I daresay a little faintly.

"He's a Finn sailor with a stiff leg and a long knife," Captain Ezra replied. "His leg aches him quite some in wet weather, but he aches all the time to ram that long *pukka* of his into Kelsey. Kelsey stole his grub, you see. And Kelsey would do him out of the share of ambergris we've set aside for him."

Two semi-cripples, I mused; a stiff legged Finn and a half paralyzed New Englander. I turned to Professor Thurston. He was advanced in years, but apparently able bodied.

"You're not in on the party?" I asked.

Captain Ezra answered for him.

"He's got a date with a university—a contract that he can't bust," he said. A chuckle escaped him when he added, "Anyway, the professor's stomach ain't normal when it comes to small boats and a capful o' wind. He's good on beasts and birds, but he sure doesn't shine on salt water."

The professor took the chaffing good naturedly.

"It's quite true," he admitted. "I'm a very poor sailor. I fear I'd be in the way—much as I'd like to go along."



FOR fully a minute I sat mulling over the situation. Boatswain Martin Kelsey, as I understood it, was outfitting a schooner to sail North. With two companions, each handicapped by a physical infirmity, I was to meet and overcome Kelsey and his crew. Truly this was adventure with a capital A. But now,

as if reading the doubts which assailed me, Captain Ezra proceeded to relieve me of some of them.

"Don't think that I'm helpless," he half roared at me. "The doctors say it may be years before I get the finishin' stroke. And I ain't goin' to get it *this* voyage, whatever happens. I can get about, stand a watch, do a trick at the wheel, tell you where to head; and in a pinch, give a pull on a halyard. Matt's knee joint's gettin' better, and he's as tough as a swordfish and a full-fledged A. B. In this day o' painters and deck swabbers A. B. means somethin'."

"What are we sailing on, and when?" I asked quite suddenly. My mind was fully made up.

"You're with us?" the captain demanded, his shrewd gray eyes probing for mental reservations.

"To the finish—whatever turns up."

A smile softened the captain's rugged features. Twin sunbursts of crinkles radiated from around his eyes, dissolving the last touch of doubt.

"We're sailin' in four days." A brown forefinger was leveled at the waterfront. "Down yonder in the channel the *Cora B.* is ridin'. The Finn's sleepin' aboard with one eye open and his *pukka* knife under his pillow."

For fully another hour we talked and planned against contingencies which might arise. Weapons would be needed and could be had in New London, close by. The selection was left to me. Provisions and water and chandler's stores for the *Cora B.*, which I learned was an eighteen-ton sloop with a gasoline kicker, were mostly aboard. Point by point we discussed our problem, eventually to speculate on when and where we'd meet Kelsey and his gang.

"It all depends on when they leave Provincetown," Captain Ezra said, scowling thoughtfully over at me. "The schooner can beat us on the wind, and we on the sloop have got to save our gas for emergencies. If we sail about the same day, Kelsey should fetch Resolution Island at the mouth o' Hudson

Strait four or five days ahead of us. With the twin cylinder kickin' now and then we can beat him in the ice. But we got to be careful about usin' gas. There ain't no stations in Hudson Bay."

"If the *Quickstep* should reach Whale Point first, it would be an awkward mess." The professor, having voiced his fear, fidgeted uneasily and glanced first at the captain and then at me. Horatio Thurston was a man of peace. He hated bloodshed. That was plain to see. "You would be outnumbered," he added gravely.

I also hated bloodshed. I'd seen enough of it to last me the rest of my lifetime—and then some. But on the other hand peace loving men can't stand for pillage and downright robbery. Should Kelsey win the first leg of the race, we aboard the *Cora B.* could intercept him. With power on we could creep under his lee. A hail, an ultimatum and, if necessary, a burst of nickel jacketed slugs, would do the trick—perhaps without bloodshed. But Captain Ezra had his own angle to air.

"I don't think we have to worry about the ambergris," he said, "because if the bosun gets there first, he won't find it where we left it cached. You see—" turning to me—"we left private word with Tukpeetwah just before he pulled out from Churchill. The stuff's stowed in a different spot—a place Kelsey knows nothin' about."

Both men were silent now. The hour was late. All that was necessary for me to know that night had been told. Yet never was I more fully awake—a day's sleep behind me, a new life ahead of me. A little regretful that I was obliged to consider the comfort of my new partners, I rose to my feet. It was then that a thought struck me.

"Suppose I hop the earliest morning train for Provincetown?" I proposed. "Kelsey doesn't know me. I could pike around and get a line on the sailing of the *Quickstep*, find out just how much of a crew she'll carry, and get back here maybe late tomorrow night."

Captain Ezra was enthusiastic.

"A bully idea!" he exclaimed.

The professor, doubtful at first on the score that I might get into trouble, finally saw the proposition our way, and lost no time in fishing out his pocket-book. And a few minutes later I was heading back for the Ashby House, where I went quietly up to my room.

But there was no sleep for me during what remained of the night. Wide eyed, I hung over the sill of the open window, distant lights winking at me across the purple waters of the Sound, the memory strong on me of manly handshakes, of tail waggings of a shaggy dog. The night wind hauled a point, wafting to me now the fragrance of a hundred gardens.

"Was it only a few hours ago," I whispered to myself, "that I was punching clocks in a garment factory?"

A stately elm across the way nodded gravely to me that such was indeed the fact. Then I laughed into the moonlight, for there was music in my heart.

CHAPTER III

FIRST BLOOD

IT WAS noon by the time I reached Provincetown and located the *Quickstep*. A fifty or sixty tonner with smart lines, she was tied up at a wharf within a few minutes' walk of the business section. She was old and needed paint badly, I saw, as I sauntered down the wharf and paused abreast the main shrouds of the two-master. The tide was low, the deck several feet beneath me. I noted dories nested beside the open main hatch, and saw a dark skinned fellow bending a new jib.

There seemed to be no hurry here, no mad rush to be off. The naked boom and gaff at the foremast told the world that a foresail at least remained to be bent. I was watching the leisurely movements of the chap with the marlin-spike when a voice almost at my elbow

startled me.

"You look for somebody?"

Insolence and suspicion were on the pockmarked face I turned to view. Unheard by me, this barefoot fellow in greasy dungarees had stepped from aft of the cabin skylight, a hank of rope-yarns slung over his shoulder, a pot of tar in one hand.

"I was looking for Kelsey," I ventured, uttering the first plausible excuse which occurred to me.

A brief silence followed. A pair of evil brown eyes looked me over from head to foot. Judging from what I had heard when making my first inquiry regarding the schooner, I was now in the presence of one of the Silva brothers, her owners.

"What you want weeth Kelsey?" came the surly question from between gleaming white teeth.

"I'll tell that to him."

The Portuguese shrugged his shoulders. But my stiff attitude had its effect.

"You'll find heem at Borden sail loft," he said more softly, and with lifted chin made a facial gesture toward the town.

"When can you sail?" I shot at the fellow before turning away. There was no harm in asking.

The brown eyes roved over the bare spars forward.

"Mebbe one week—mebbe ten days."

Again my friend shrugged his dungaree clad shoulders, and again he stared at me in unsatisfied curiosity.

I could feel his eyes in my back as I walked toward the pier head congratulating myself that I was through with my mission. I had seen the *Quickstep*. She had scarcely a chance to beat us on the getaway. And that was that. But I hadn't laid eyes on Martin Kelsey; and I had nearly two hours on my hands before train time. So naturally I bent my steps toward the sail loft, where Caleb Borden, gnarled and twisted New Englander, looked up from his palm and needle long enough to tell me

that Mr. Kelsey had departed some fifteen minutes before.

It seemed to me as I stood looking down at the sailmaker, that he had just begun on the first cloths of a foresail. He might run the seams by machine, but even so, working single handed, he had three or four days to go.

"D'ye believe in prohibition?" the old man asked quite suddenly, a twinkle in his eyes.

I was taken aback, but before I could answer, the sailmaker shed a light.

"Kelsey don't believe in prohibition," he said with a chuckle. "That's why you can find him like's not at Brava's Pool Parlor."

I took the hint, and within ten minutes' time, at a bar in a frowsy establishment dedicated supposedly to pool and soft drinks, I was standing elbow to elbow with Martin Kelsey. I knew him at once from the description Professor Thurston had given me—closely cropped head atop a barrel shaped body; piggish eyes, a bulbous nose, tobacco stained lips set in a perpetual sneer. And to complete my identification a tattooed star bore witness—a blue star at the base of the thumb and forefinger now curled around a thick bottomed glass. He glanced at me casually, then resumed the fingering of his glass.

"All we got is soft drinks, mister," a Portuguese in a cheap silk shirt told me as he swabbed the bar and eyed me suspiciously.

I grinned at the crude and premature alibi and ordered ginger ale. I wanted nothing more than a good look at Kelsey. I'd had it. Alone, as Kelsey seemed to be, it was unlikely I'd overhear anything of value. I'd finish my glass and go on my way. But it was not to be so.



THERE was a game at one of the nearby pool tables. I had turned my back to the bar to watch it, when, at the sound of a voice lowered almost to a whisper, I looked around. It was my

barefoot friend from the schooner. He had entered noiselessly and had just finished muttering something in Kelsey's ear. The eyes of both men were now on me, and there was a poisonous quality in the boatswain's stare which told me I'd not be able to leave unquestioned.

"What was you prowlin' around the *Quickstep* for?" he demanded.

I tried to assume an air of injured innocence.

"I wasn't prowling. I was looking for Mr. Kelsey."

"I'm Kelsey," he grated, his eyes boring into me. "What d'you want?"

"I want a job. I'm a yacht quartermaster out of a berth. I heard—"

But the boatswain gave me no time to finish my weak excuse.

"Ye're a liar!" he snapped, and spat at my feet. I bristled. "Ye're either a dirty prohi or a sneak from Noank," he finished, and simultaneously I glimpsed his fingers tighten around the glass.

With almost incredible rapidity his arm lashed sidewise. Intuitively I ducked and closed my eyes. Barely had I opened them and sensed potent liquor streaming from my hat brim, before Kelsey swung at me. I dodged the blow, but a left jab caught me full in the chest and sent me staggering back against a pool table. Had it not been a short armed punch, I'd have been hurt. As it was, instead of collapsing, I rebounded and lashed out straight from the shoulder. I can't say where I aimed to land, but every ounce of my hundred and seventy pounds was behind the wallop—which Kelsey met with his bulbous nose.

What followed is by no means clear. I remember blood—everywhere. I remember Kelsey, two hundredweight of bone and sinew, and in spite of his bulk, both fast and clever. I was outmatched. But I fought desperately, putting all I knew into the fight, and taking the punishment as it came. A feint with the left and drive with the right proved successful, and I was encouraged to re-

peat, when suddenly I realized outsiders taking a hand. An outthrust foot sent me sprawling. On one knee I heard the swish of a billiard cue, and some one clouted me behind the ear. All the world burst into flame, and then blackness came. I have the faintest recollection and the faraway shrill of police whistles.

The police saved me a severe beating. It seems there were a couple of fishermen in the place who objected to the two to one game, and took a hand. Constables quelled the riot which followed and herded us all into the justice's court, then in session. With strict impartiality the magistrate fined each one of us and, after a second look at Kelsey, advised him to see a doctor about his nose.

I was one of the first prisoners to find the necessary ten dollars for the clerk. One long stare of hatred from Kelsey, and I caught a muttered threat about seeing me again.

"I guess we'll meet again," I said to him softly, and tried to smile.

It was hard to smile, with bruised lips and a swollen and stinging ear. My knuckles were bleeding. There was a lump the size of a crabapple atop my head. Yet I think I managed the smile.

Hatless, I gained the station and sought the washroom. With paper towels and cold water I did the best I could for myself, finding more lumps and bruised spots at each explorative dab. Truly I had met Martin Kelsey—and he wasn't good to look upon. These and many other thoughts ran through my mind as I finished my first aid work and sat loafing in the sun until train time.

Speaking physically, this Provincetown trip had been a costly one, I mused, as I sat nursing my bruises. But I'd know Kelsey when I laid eyes on him again. And I'd be able to pick his schooner out of a hundred others. For she'd be sporting a brand new jib and foresail. The backing-in of the train interrupted my reflections, and with a

wary eye for Kelsey or any one who looked like one of his understrappers, I passed along the platform and climbed aboard the smoker.

It was an accommodation. Long and arduous was the trip back to Noank. There were two changes. My head and body ached. But every now and then I managed a grin as I looked down on my skinned knuckles and thought of Kelsey's bulbous nose. So far, on the eve of this race to the North, honors were even. And first blood was ours.

CHAPTER IV

SAILING DAY—AND AFTERWARD

IT WAS still dark when on the morning of sailing day I joined the professor and captain at breakfast. It was anything but a jolly affair. Noiselessly the professor's housekeeper passed to and from the kitchen, pouring coffee, heaping our plates, and stepping carefully around the big Newfoundland who sat in glum dignity behind his master's chair. There was no conversation. All had been planned, contingencies discussed, and nothing remained to be said but "Goodby." I think there was a lump in each of our throats, as in the gray of early morning we stole down the path and walked out on the shipyard dock.

Captain Ezra, with the help of his cane, did nobly. Unaided he climbed over the rail of the *Cora B.* and stood watching Matt the Finlander empty the last five-gallon container into the gas tank. The dripping funnel was withdrawn, the gasket inspected, and the sailor applied his wrench.

"Give her an extra twist, Matt," the skipper directed.

"Aye-aye, sir."

The first of the ebb tide sucked at the keel of the sloop. Patches of gold and orange began to show on the horizon to the eastward of Lantern Hill. The mainsail was unstopped, the kicker switched on and placed in neutral. Now,

at a word from Captain Ezra, I cast off the springline and shook hands with the misty eyed scholar. As I hopped aboard and stood pushing against the spiling, his voice came softly across the widening chasm.

The popping engine drowned the last of the parting benediction, the *Cora B.* swung on her heel, and when I looked up from hauling in the fender, it was to glimpse the first rays of the rising sun touching the white head of our partner. Beside him, as rigid as if pointing game, the shaggy Newfoundland stood, its black muzzle uplifted in dumb query.

"Better get the mains'l on her, Buck," Captain Ezra called to me as I turned to note a channel buoy slip by to port.

I was Buck from now on, and as Matt and I alternated between throat and peak halyards, the captain sat in the low chair we had rigged for him behind the wheel. Skilfully he manipulated the polished spokes and, as we hauled the sheet aft and the sloop heeled to the thrust of the offshore breeze, he kicked off the magneto switch and stood away for Block Island.

Blue water ahead of us, the low hills of Connecticut sinking astern, we coiled down and tidied up. Matt took the wheel, that Captain Ezra might smoke, and now I found leisure for the first time to study the Finn at close range.

He was a bilious looking fellow with furrowed brow and greasy skin. Beneath one deepset eye, and running almost to the tip of his left ear, a gleaming scar showed through the stubble of reddish brown beard. I knew him to be a man of exceptional strength, for already I'd seen the gaff of the heavy mainsail fairly leap to his pull on the throat halyards. "No wonder," ran through my mind as I observed the hairy and enormous forearms, the knotted biceps almost bursting through the faded blue flannel of the rolled up sleeves.

Long, long before, I had heard that Finnish seamen were mostly grim and taciturn, given to the choosing of

thwartship bunks in the darkest recesses of the forecabin, where, unobserved by their mates, they could sulk and worship strange gods. And I had heard, too, that to a Finn sailor a knife fight rated better than shore leave as a form of entertainment.

With my eyes fixed on the scar slashed face of the helmsman, I was wondering in what strange waters he'd received the souvenir, and what the fight had been about, when suddenly Matt raised his eyes from the binnacle and looked full at me. Before I could look away, or even put a bit of nonchalance into my stare, his thin lips parted in a grin—a good natured grin of approval.

"You and Matt are goin' to get along fine," Captain Ezra commented. Seated near the cabin companion while dragging on his pipe, he had observed the grin and now shed light on the reason for it. "Matt's a queer bird." He chuckled, looking aft of the leech of the mainsail at a tug wallowing ahead of its tow of barges. "There's so many K's in his family name that it sounds like a bunch o' firecrackers poppin'." He's a true Finn—either likes you or hates your guts. He began to like you even before he laid eyes on you."

"How so?" I asked. I was naturally puzzled.

"It was Tuesday night, wasn't it, that you got back from your little trip to Provincetown?"

I nodded, still wondering, and he explained:

"Well, Wednesday mornin', while you was shoppin' in New London, I told Matt about your scrap with the bosun. Right off he wanted to know what you weighed. I told him. He was disappointed. But he brightened up when I told him you'd admitted givin' Kelsey a bloody nose. Now Matt's your friend for life."

This was pleasant if true. The wind, hauling a point or two, put an end to the conversation, for a slackening jib sheet needed my attention.



THERE was little to do now but steer and keep lookout. One man could do that; and barring rough weather, when all hands would be needed to shorten sail, two of us could either sleep or loaf in the cockpit. It was arranged from the first that Captain Ezra was to stand no night tricks at the wheel. He was to be captain in fact, relieved from all humdrum routine incidental to plain sailing. Matt was to constitute the port watch. I was to be starboard. Four hours on, four hours off—and the regular dog watches in the evening.

But the old whaleman refused to let us have our way entirely.

"I insist on bein' the cook," he said stoutly when we thought we had everything settled. "You men need your rest when you ain't at the wheel. And I ain't so bad at turnin' out a fair to middlin' apple pie."

We gave in. Until we reached the ice the skipper should find contentment in lesser responsibilities. And so thrice daily we became accustomed to the sight of Captain Ezra bending over the hissing Primus in the tiny galley partitioned off from the rest of the cabin.

The *Cora B.* was a tidy eighteen tonner of the plank-on-edge type, equipped with all sorts of conveniences for sail hoisting and anchor raising. She drew quite a bit of water, but to my mind the headroom in the large and comfortable cabin more than compensated for the disadvantage. Tons of lead on the keel stiffened her and made it possible to carry full sail when other craft of her size would have been forced to reef. It was during the second dog watch that Captain Ezra touched on the history of the cruiser.

"An English fellow built her only last season," he said, looking up from the side lights he was inspecting. "He put every doodad money could buy into her. Look at them mahogany and teak fittin's. Feel o' that upholstery you're sittin' on. Well, he never got to sail her. Wall Street cleaned him slick's a gutted

eel. The creditors took this sloop. Me 'n' the professor bid it in last April. It was cheap, but it come high for us. Took the last cent the doctors left me. And Thurston had to slap a mortgage on his cottage."

I finished my supper and went out to relieve Matt. Presently Captain Ezra joined me, and cast a mariner's eye around and aloft. The wind had hauled no more, and with a whole sail breeze on her port quarter, the *Cora B.* was rushing merrily along, a creamy path aft of her leading straight into the eye of the setting sun.

"We'll take Muskeget Channel," the captain said, hooking his cane over the cockpit coaming and lowering himself on to a cushion. "I guess I'll stay up till we round Cross Rip lightship," he added.

Matt appeared with the side lights and placed them in their screens. I couldn't help but note that he favored one leg, and now my thoughts turned to Kelsey. We'd be a week ahead of him, I reflected as I stared alternately into the lighted binnacle and out beyond the bellying jib. If we kept on at this speed, we'd get the ambergris aboard and maybe miss the *Quickstep* entirely. Hudson Bay was a big body of water. An indefinable sense of disappointment touched me. I tried to analyze the feeling. Could it be possible that I was actually craving combat and bloodshed? Was I, after all—

The captain's voice put a stop to my troubled examination of self.

"This is the eighteenth time," he said, stretching a shadowy arm out over the weather beam, "that I've left Gay Head Light on the port hand, bound on a long voyage. Sixteen o' them times was aboard whaleships."

Through the gathering darkness the distant light blinked a greeting—and a farewell.

During the next few hours I listened while the skipper opened his book of memories and regaled me with stories of faraway places and waters "back of

the beyond". It was seven bells when finally he yawned and reached for his cane. A look to windward, a brief inspection of Cross Rip lightship rolling abeam, and he clumped off below.

I wasn't long in following, for as I was about to place the wheel in beackets while I called Matt, the Finn himself moved back the sliding hatch and stepped to my side. I gave him the course.

"No'theast by east," he repeated after me, and took the wheel.

Within three minutes' time I was lying in my berth. The air was close below, but the opening of a hinged port helped amazingly. For a long time I lay awake, listening to the gurgling and slapping of waters against the outer skin of the flying sloop. A rhythmic snore came softly from the captain's bunk across the cabin. The sound lulled rather than disturbed me, and my thoughts fell into pleasant grooves. Just before I fell asleep, as near as I can recollect, I was grinning over my escape from the gloomy corridors of the garment factory.

So ended the first day aboard the *Cora B*.



OTHER days and nights passed, with varied luck. A fair wind drove us across the fog ridden Banks and through the Strait of Belle Isle, but as rugged Newfoundland melted on the starboard quarter and we began the long creep up the Labrador coast, a howling northeaster smote us. Luckily for our comfort, if not our safety, heavy pack ice to windward kept the seas down, and under a double reefed mainsail we headed stubbornly on our course. Four days of this, and then suddenly the gale moderated and the wind backed around to a point westward of north. We shook out our reefs and began the long beat to windward.

It was tiresome work. Four hours on; four hours off. Westward on the starboard tack until it needed no glass to make out the glacier scoured fiord

entrances, the saw toothed and alpine horned outlines of the black and forbidding Torngat Range. Then would come the port tack, the long reach out into the Atlantic, where vast fields of floe ice and majestic bergs drifted sparkling in the July sun.

"The caplin are workin' north and into the inlets now," Captain Ezra said one morning when I'd just relieved Matt at the wheel. "The codfish always follow the caplin," he went on, raising his binoculars for a look at a schooner crossing our bows. "That's why we ain't seen many trawlers since leavin' the Strait. This feller ahead of us—"

Abruptly the captain left off speaking. When I could spare him a glance, I saw him thumbing the screw of the glasses to a finer focus. There was suppressed excitement in his bearing, as, after studying the distant craft for fully a minute, he whipped the binoculars from his eyes and handed them to me.

"I b'lieve it's the *Quickstep*," he said, frowning. "See what you make of her."

I bellied up against the wheel and adjusted the glasses. They were of my own selection, bought in New London, and of twenty-power magnification. Necessarily the field was narrow, but presently I picked up the schooner and held her. She was a two-master, on the port tack, and with all sails set was heeled over to an angle which soon would give me a clean sweep of her deck. Her jib and foresail were new.

She was a flushdecker, a single nest of dories stacked in her waist. The bulging mainsail hid from view the man at the helm, but the angle was getting better for me with every passing moment. More and more she fell to starboard, and just before we crossed the milky line which marked her wake I had a clear view of the man at the wheel. He was a darkish fellow in faded blue dungarees. I could have taken my oath that he was the pockmarked Silva with the gleaming white teeth.

"It's the *Quickstep* all right," I reported for Captain Ezra's benefit, and

continued my survey of our rival's deck.

She was directly abeam now. I could sweep her entire weather rail. Three figures came into my field. One of them loomed a head taller than his fellows. His face was turned downward, as if he were examining something in his hands. And then suddenly his arms came into view, his elbows rested on the rail, and a telescope was leveled at us. Still finer I drew the focus—and thrilled as I gazed upon the unlovely and unforgettable features of Martin Kelsey.

"The bosun's looking us over," I said, handing the glasses back to the captain.

Again he studied the schooner from Provincetown, and as the angle widened and the visibility lessened, he fell to sweeping the offshore pack.

"I don't know how she did it," he muttered after a little time in a voice barely audible. "But she's fast and able," he continued, "and them Portuguese certainly know how to drive her."

It was time to go about. I gave her a good full and put the wheel hard down. She took stays nicely. I put a becket over one of the spokes and hopped forward to ease over the jib. I was absent for only a few seconds, but on my return, much to my surprise, I found Captain Ezra at the wheel. His eyes were fixed on the *Quickstep*, now barely visible to starboard under the clew of the jib.

"Buck," he said grimly, "I'm spellin' you at the wheel while you go below and lay out our artillery. Almost anything can happen now."

CHAPTER V

IN THE SHORT NIGHT

A STRONG southeast wind drove up Hudson Strait, pressing with invisible fingers against the lighter floes and holding the ice in a compact mass which no vessel could penetrate. Seven days had passed since we had last seen the *Quickstep* vanish behind a

lofty berg in the loose pack skirting Resolution Island at the Strait's entrance. She was faster than the deeper and smaller *Cora B*, and not once since I'd entered the cabin to "lay out our artillery" had we been within a mile of her.

But now, as we picked our cautious way along the edge of the floe, looking for a basin, an angle, a jutting horn behind which we might take refuge until the wind changed, we sighted the bare poles of a schooner nestling in the lee of a triangular mass of "mush-top".

"Looks like a battle might come off hereabouts," Captain Ezra muttered as he lowered the binoculars and gave his attention to our immediate needs.

"We're ready, sir," I said, and essayed a cheerful tone.

The formation, the contour, of our edge of the pack, necessitated our finding a berth at the same place occupied by the *Quickstep*. Toward the center of the Strait I saw what appeared to be equally desirable shelter for us, and wondered if Captain Ezra had chosen to bring matters to a head at this stage of the voyage. On more than one occasion he'd expressed a desire to retrieve our treasure peaceably, to await at least one overt act from the enemy before showing our teeth. Personally, I didn't care. Rather than have this battle hanging over us for days, perhaps for weeks, it might be better to get it over with now—once and for all; win or lose.

A chuckle from the skipper broke my train of thought.

"Looks just as good over there, doesn't it?" he asked, his good left arm pointing off toward the middle of the Strait, his eyes a-twinkle.

I nodded. We were drawing nearer the *Quickstep* each passing moment. It was all right with me. But I didn't quite understand.

"Don't think I'm crowdin' matters," the old whaleman went on. He spoke gravely now. "There's more danger out yonder—" the gray head twitched to port—"than there is in here. Mebbe

you'll understand in a few hours."

We were now around the jagged corner of the triangular floe, and within a mile of the moored schooner. Captain Ezra took the wheel, and soon Matt and I were carrying out his orders. The jib was hauled down, the main halyard let go. The captain luffed, and with lessening way the sloop stole into the wind's eye and slipped quietly over the smooth water. Matt was ready with a boathook. He fended off and stepped upon the mushy surface of the floe.

"Watch him make fast," Captain Ezra bade me as I stood at a loss just what to do.

Often I'd wondered how vessels "tied up" to smooth ice. Now I saw. Matt was kicking a spot clear of soggy snow and slush some ten feet distant from the edge. With an ice spade—a wide chisel set on the end of a pole—he fell to chopping a six-inch hole obliquely into the solid ice. Three feet or so in and he shifted his position and chipped another hole. This tapped the first one driven. Now Matt passed his line—down through the first hole, up through the second, and the trick was done.

"Now he fetches the end aboard and makes it fast," Captain Ezra explained. "We don't have to go on the ice any more—unless we want to. By lettin' go one end the warp reeves through when we shove off."

"Clever," I commented, and was about to give Matt a hand at knotting the stops on the mainsail, when a dutiful glance toward the schooner caused me to turn and make for the cabin.

"They're coming," I called to my companions as I crossed the cockpit.

It was but a moment's work to gather up the weapons. I hastened back and handed Captain Ezra his long barreled Colt. Its magazine was crammed with soft nosed .45's and an extra shot lay ready under the firing pin. Matt reached eagerly for a pistol prepared likewise, and stood scowling at the oncoming men.

There were four of them, perhaps five

hundred yards away. As they came slopping along through the ankle deep slush, I gave my attention to my own weapon. It was a Thompson sub-machine gun of the latest pattern. One hundred .45's were coiled spirally in its drum magazine, and armed with it I felt capable of standing off almost anything short of light artillery. I wound the drum spring its required fifteen clicks, cocked the piece and rested the barrel across the edge of the cockpit coaming. I was ready.



THE sun was high. In spite of the proximity of the heavy ice, the day was hot. As I glanced around at my companions I noticed that the Finn was actually sweating. Curious, I thought, for a man to sweat in such a latitude, and then it occurred to me that he'd been hard at work chopping ice.

"Don't forget that thumb latch," I cautioned him, for at previous drills with the automatic he'd neglected more than once to depress the safety device.

"Aye," Matt growled, and with a heavy forearm wiped his streaming face.

The men from the *Quickstep* were drawing closer. It had been easy to pick out Kelsey's hulking figure, striding along in advance, a rifle over his shoulder. Now we began to recognize faces.

"Them two fellows just behind Kelsey are the Silva brothers," Captain Ezra said. He lowered the binoculars and again picked up the Colt. "They sailed with me once on the *Sunbeam*. When the price of bone and oil went down they left off whalin' and took up fishin'. When the price of whisky went up they took to rum runnin'."

Splashing on abreast of each other and close on the heels of the boatswain, I saw two men in faded dungarees. They appeared to be unarmed. As they drew still nearer I saw that they were the same men I had first seen aboard the *Quickstep* in Provincetown. A little to the rear of the Portuguese brothers

a young chap in high boots splashed along. Not to my knowledge had I ever laid eyes on him.

"Watch that rifle," I said in a low tone, "and keep a sharp lookout on what they do with their hands."

Twenty yards, ten yards—and I figured they'd come close enough.

"Stay where you are," I called. "And keep that rifle right where it is."

Kelsey halted, and as his piggyish eyes roved over the cockpit and took in the preparations made for his reception, I fancied his jaw dropped an inch or two. The others drew slowly abreast of him, then halted likewise.

"The pockmarked feller's Joe Silva," Captain Ezra said under his breath. "His brother Manuel stands next to him. I dunno who the young feller in the boots is."

For a few moments nothing other than the honk of low flying geese, the gentle lapping of water against the floe, could be heard; then Kelsey spoke.

"We came over here in a friendly way," he said, directing his words at Captain Ezra. "In a friendly way," he repeated, "to dish out some good advice."

"Too bad to get your feet wet," was the skipper's sarcastic rejoinder.

Two dabs of color appeared on Kelsey's cheek. As the barrel of the shouldered rifle wobbled slightly, my forefinger crept within the trigger guard of the Thompson. But for the time being Kelsey mastered his temper.

"I'm tellin' you to sail away while the sailin's good," he warned thickly. "We're goin' to beat you to Whale Point and stow that stuff aboard. Then we—"

"If you do, we'll take it away from you," I felt called upon to interrupt.

Immediately Kelsey transferred his wrath to me.

"Let me tell you somethin'," he managed to utter intelligibly, and paused long enough to spit upon the slush at his feet. "We're five to your three. There's another lad aboard the schooner. We got four more o' these, too." With

his free hand he clapped the butt of the rifle on his shoulder.

From the corner of my eye I glimpsed the Finn's gnarled trigger finger quivering. An inarticulate sound came from him—a growl of suppressed hatred associated usually with caged beasts disturbed at their meat.

"Lay off, Matt!" I called sternly to him, and then addressed Kelsey.

"Now let me give you a bit of advice," I said, and shifted the muzzle of the sub-machine gun a few inches to the right. "Look up to windward," I called.

All four of the visitors from the *Quickstep* looked off beyond one of the angles of the floe. Between five and six hundred yards away a small berg of fantastic shape lay sparkling in the sun. A slim pinnacle of blue ice shot heavenward from its nearer façade. Rapidly I estimated distance and windage, and took aim.

"Watch that horn," I called, and pressed trigger for a moment or two.



IT WAS a small burst of five. Chips of ice flew from the base of the horn. The staccato echo rebounded from the facets of the berg and was taken up by the floe's lip. Again I pressed the trigger, this time for a longer burst. The elevation was correct. Twenty steel slugs wiped across the pinnacle's base, and as if folded on a dotted line it leaned and fell. A veil of spray arose, hid the berg, and dropped back into the boiling sea. Now a crashing sound came to our ears, drowning the stuttering echoes of the Thompson.

"Look here!" I called when I thought my voice would be heard.

Four heads turned. Four pairs of eyes were fixed on the hand with which I patted the magazine drum of my weapon.

"This baby holds a hundred shots," I went on to say. "It kills at upward of two thousand yards—about as far's you can see a man."

I paused to let my words sink in, and

looked briefly at each man on the ice. Kelsey stood stiffly erect, his eyes fastened on me, a burning hatred kindling in their depths. The sneer on the face of Joe Silva had frozen, as, open mouthed, he hung on my next words. His brother Manuel was plucking with nervous fingers at the hem of his dungaree blouse, his eyes on the muzzle of the sub-machine gun. Of the four, the young chap in the high boots was the first to look away from me. He was standing a little apart from the others, a puzzled expression apparent in the glances he bent now on Kelsey, now on the Silva brothers.

But I had no time to reflect on the stand of the unknown. I had a message to get over. Time was flying, the situation strained, and I had to reckon with Matt's doubtful patience.

"We don't crave to kill anybody," I resumed, "but now that you've seen what we can do we want you to let us alone. If you beat us to Whale Point, we'll lay off and drill figures through the cabin and hull of your boat. That's all. Run along now and think it over."

"Go back and dry your feet," Captain Ezra chipped in.

Inarticulate sounds came from the floe. There was a shuffling in the slush.

"Git!" Captain Ezra shouted, and raised the muzzle of his pistol until it pointed squarely at Kelsey's middle.

One tense instant and the enemy wavered and fell back. Slowly at first, then more briskly, the four retreated over the mush.

"We'll have to keep extra sharp lookout now," the skipper said as the strain lessened and we faced each other.

"Especially through the dark hours," I put in.

Captain Ezra laughed as he thrust his pistol into a holster he'd contrived to lash to his chair, and set about filling and lighting his pipe.

"This time o' year," he said, "the sun only goes to bed for a couple o' hours. And even then, with no moon, it won't get very dark. The starlight and the

ice blink gives you a range of a hundred yards or so."

We stopped our lowered sails and then took turns at eating. From now on, until the wind changed, there must be an armed observer seated in the cockpit, his eyes on the *Quickstep*. During the darker hours it was planned we all should be fully dressed and ready for instant action.

Slowly the afternoon wore on. The circling sun seemed to have dropped a bit toward the invisible Labrador side. Captain Ezra was napping below. Matt was officially on lookout at this time, and I sprawled lazily on the cushions aft of the wheel, watching the antics of a family of seals gathered on the edge of the floe halfway between us and the schooner. At times they seemed to be playing a game of tag. Their backs glistened in the sun as they scurried awkwardly over the mush, squealing, barking, slipping over the low shelf of the floe to frolic in the still water.

At other times they basked motionless, dabs of black against a background of dazzling white. My gaze was casual at one of these quieter moments, when suddenly I saw that each seal had reared its head, to balance almost on its hind flippers. I was wondering what had attracted their attention, when from far up the Strait came the faint rumble of what I took to be thunder. Instead of a single peal, though, or a succession of claps, the sound was a deep throated murmur which grew louder and louder.

"Thunder?" I asked.

Matt shook his head.

"Naw," he said. "It's ice—big ice. You see her come pretty soon."

The sound grew into the most hellish uproar I had ever heard. The drum fire of the World War, when artillery placed almost hub to hub was sweeping the enemy's lines, was faint music compared with this diapason rumble which shook heaven and earth. Presently in the distance a shining object appeared.

Slowly it moved oceanward on a course

which would pass us a mile or so to the westward. Now I saw that it was an enormous berg. Turreted, pinnaced, of fantastic shape, it might have been likened to a monstrous battleship. But it was larger than any ship conceived by man. Blue shadows and purple caverns dappled the towering side turned toward us. As if grooved in a slot it moved at a five knot pace, deviating neither to port nor starboard, crashing through the motionless floe ice as if it were mere tissue paper.

"Ain't she a beauty?" I heard shouted in my ear.

I turned to see Captain Ezra at my elbow.

"She's a blue lady from Fox Channel," he added. "She goes down hundreds of feet into the water—catches the swift undercurrent below. The wind catches the lip o' the field ice and holds it back. She don't care a rip for that."



ACRES of ice fourteen and sixteen feet thick were lifted, stood on edge, piled like a disorderly shuffle of cards, then scattered aside, to fall into the wake of the giant berg. The sea boiled. The ice around us quivered. The keel of the *Cora B.* moved gently; her topmast described a pattern against the sky. The tumult was now so great that the human voice could not be heard above it. Vainly I tried to catch the import of Captain Ezra's next words as he leaned on his cane and shouted unintelligibly at me.

But gradually the noise lessened, and but for an uncomfortable sensation in my ears, I was again the calm spectator and able to hear.

"Never tie up in the middle o' the channel," I heard the skipper say as he stood eyeing the slowly vanishing berg. "That's one of our rigid rules. There may be more of 'em march through before we get away from here."

The last of the noise died away. Time passed. What normally would have been the first night watch found the

red sun still fairly high on our quarter. But at length it sank behind the ice fields over toward the Labrador side. I must have fallen into a doze about this time, for when Matt laid his hand on my shoulder to rouse me for my watch darkness had fallen.

It was far from being pitch-dark, though. A half hearted aurora burned lurid and ghastly in the Northern skies, and a few stars shed a faint light over the mushy surface of the floe, now a great expanse mottled with purple and violet shadows where occasional low hummocks showed. The naked spars of the *Quickstep* were hardly visible through the binoculars and, on account of the narrow field of the powerful lenses, were hard to find.

Along toward midnight it grew quite cool. I could feel moisture in the air. And suddenly the stars were blotted out. A light fog had arisen. But as yet there was no change in the direction of the wind. Vapors floated up the Strait from oceanward, veiling from me all sight of the schooner. From now on I had to depend on my ears rather than my eyes, and for fifteen or twenty minutes I sat listening to the soft lapping of water on the floe lip, the gentle snoring of Captain Ezra, asleep in his chair.

It had been arranged that all three of us should remain on deck during the dark hours, and with the cocked Thompson resting across my knees, and my armed companions close by, little thought of danger crossed my mind. After my demonstration with the sub-machine gun, what manner of men would be foolhardy enough to attempt a night attack?

Lulled by a sense of security, I fell to reviewing the strange happenings of the last few weeks. I wondered what unfortunate was now treading the gloomy corridors of the garment factory in my stead. Was the employment situation picking up? New York, Noank, Provincetown—fleeting mental pictures of cities and faces came to me, and then, at the faint rumble of ice far up the

Strait, my mind became occupied with the present and future.

When would the wind change? How long would it take us to get through and load the ambergris? And after it was marketed, and I received my twenty thousand dollars, what on earth was I to do with it? The World War had come into my life just after my school-days. I had no real trade. Influenza had taken both my parents from me, even as the Armistice was being arranged. Alone in the world, free, white, unmarried, not yet thirty-four, and with twenty thousand—

A point of light on the floe pricked the haze and broke my train of thought. Simultaneously I heard the faint click of what sounded like a cigar lighter being operated. Almost instantly the light disappeared, but as I fancied I saw a figure crouching a dozen yards away, I raised my gun.

"Who's there?" I challenged.

The answer came—a fiery arc, and something plopped into the cockpit and lay sputtering on the grating. There may have been time for a burst, but I doubt it. Some God-given sense, connected perhaps with trench training, impelled me to pick up the missile and hurl it far outboard. As it left my fingers its nature flashed upon me, but even as I turned to destroy the menace on the ice, invisible fingers plucked at my clothing and a savage blast of air sent me lurching across the cockpit. There was no blinding flash, no deafening detonation; but following the sullen underwater *hr-r-rumph!* the *Cora B.* rocked drunkenly, and at the same time a light shower of brine pattered down upon her.

"Steady all!" boomed Captain Ezra as he wakened to find the sloop plunging and tugging at her warp. "What's happened?" he asked gruffly a moment later.

Matt crouched rigid, peering into the fog toward the schooner. I looked in the same direction, but could see nothing.

Now, briefly, I told the little there was to tell.

"It was three sticks of dynamite tied with a ropeyarn," I finished, "and the fuse must have been waterproof."

"The damned cowardly murderers!" Captain Ezra blazed.

I felt the same way about it myself. As for Matt, he stood muttering something in his native tongue.

"Guess it'll be shoot at 'em on sight after this," were Captain Ezra's next words.

As far as I was concerned I was willing to bring matters to a head. With the coming of daylight it would be easy to riddle the *Quickstep* from bowsprit to taffrail. We had plenty of ammunition. With slight pauses for cooling between bursts, I could pour a deadly stream into the moored schooner. No human being could expect to escape alive or unwounded. It may sound blood-thirsty. It probably was. But before I could broach the idea or consider it more fully I was conscious of changes in our situation.

Many things were happening at once. A distant grinding and crunching sound came to my ears—a sound far different from that made by the cruising berg.

"Wind's haulin' to the west'ard," the skipper said as the cutwater of the *Cora B.* bumped gently against the lip of the mush-top.

Matt fended off. I looked at Captain Ezra for orders, but found him staring toward the orange loom of the rising sun.

The fog was dispersing already. The wind strengthened, and down it floated the squealing of block sheaves and the voices of men. There were clear patches of sky and water now, and presently I glimpsed the swelling mainsail of the *Quickstep*. Already the murderous gang had hoisted canvas and were getting under way.

We, too, were soon off and headed for a blue lane in the opening pack, the faster *Quickstep* a thousand yards in the lead.

CHAPTER VI

INSIDE THE REEF

THERE came a morning when we left the last patch of ice behind and entered Hudson Bay. Far to the westward, across sullen lead colored waters, I looked upon the white speck which marked the disappearing topsail of the fleeter *Quickstep*. In spite of our engine, notwithstanding the masterly conning of Captain Ezra, the Provincetown schooner had outsailed us and was now showing a clean pair of heels.

"I know a short cut past Southampton Island," the old whaleman told me as he came up from breakfast and lowered himself into his chair. "It'll save us a day," he continued, "but even at that the schooner'll beat us to Whale Point."

As I manipulated the wheel, glancing every now and then at the sluggish compass card, I reflected that little profit would accrue to Kelsey through reaching the Point ahead of us. The cache of ambergris had been changed. The secret was safe with Tukpeetwah, the native who had already locked horns with the thieving Kelsey. It would take time for an elaborate search of the territory, and before physical pressure could be brought to bear on Tukpeetwah we would be on the job.

"Give her two more points to starboard," the captain ordered after a calculating glance over the port quarter at the purplish outline of Cape Wolstenholme.

I obeyed; but the binnacle gave me little help. In reality I had to guess at the ordered two points until the lazy card swung around. Captain Ezra was watching me, an amused expression on his face.

"Now you know one of the reasons why airplanes can't fool around up here," he went on to say. "You're in trouble doin' nine or ten knots. A plane does better'n a hundred. When we get over toward the point, I'll show you more reasons why a vessel's bet-

ter'n a plane."

Next day the compass was almost useless. We steered by clouds, by the dim outlines of Southampton Island on the starboard hand. When the sun slipped below the horizon for its brief absence, stars guided us through the short cut Captain Ezra had mentioned. It was a strait marked on but few charts. Indeed, the entire region was imperfectly surveyed and mapped. What was supposedly the southern tip of Southampton Island was in reality a separate island. We were now in Fisher's Strait.

"I sailed with Elnathan Fisher on the Bark *Mornin' Star* when he discovered this passage," Captain Ezra informed me as he sat smoking in the twilight. "Mighty few charts show it. Admiralty charts from England are the best, but they show everything almost a degree out o' the way. It's a hell of a place, this Bay. Bad charts, strong currents, ice ten months o' the year, no lighthouses—and a useless compass to top all that."

The skipper spat disgustedly to leeward, then ceased his growling long enough to study the course and pick out a new star for me. Presently Matt came to relieve me at the wheel, and I went below and crawled into my bunk. For a long time I lay thinking of the stirring events to come—the meeting with my first Eskimos, the strange sights Captain Ezra had promised me at the earliest glimpse of Whale Point on the edge of the Barrens. Then, inevitably, came thoughts of the fight to come. We *had* to win. On land or sea, in spite of dynamite and superior numbers, we would be the victors. Tense and relaxed in turn, I lay pondering, until at length sleep came to me.

Tedious watches came and went. Twenty-four hours later I was at the wheel again. Captain Ezra, his chin on his breast, was dozing peacefully in his chair.

"Keep her straight for dat red bluff," Matt had said on releasing the spokes

to me before going below.

Alone now but for the slumbering skipper, I glanced around. On an even keel the *Cora B.* was sweeping westward before a fair wind. Astern, to port and starboard, there was nothing to be seen but an expanse of gray water flecked with a casual whitecap. But directly ahead of us an enormous red bluff towered skyward. High land stretched away on both sides of it, bold streaks of purple and violet. The Labrador coast had been high and rugged; but not like this.

We drew nearer. The red bluff seemed to lift from its base—to detach itself from the sea. The purple and violet bands seemed to lift also and paste themselves across the clear sky. Gradually the reds and purples became intense, and soon I noted that every color showed but green. It was an eerie spectacle. I stared at this unearthly appearing land, and momentarily neglected my helm. The *Cora B.* dipped smartly as the wind took her slightly abeam, and Captain Ezra raised his head.

"Starboard a little," he cautioned; and then, as he became more fully awake, he turned to me with a grin.

"There's another argument against airplanes," he said, jerking his thumb toward the strange coastline. "That red bluff is Whale Point. How high d'you reckon it is?"

"Maybe three thousand feet."

The skipper chuckled.

"It's under a hundred," he said, "and none o' that other land you see each side rates better'n forty feet."

"Mirage?" I ventured.

"That's it. And it's hardly ever twice alike. Sometimes you see the Point upside down. I've seen whales and ships cruisin' along, many a time, upside down along the sky. And when there ain't been a ship or a steamer within a thousand mile."

"Every color except green," I said, wondering.

"You'll see nothin' else but green

when we get closer in. And one hour after you see the first o' the green we'll have Eskimos alongside in their little *kyacks* and big *omiacks*."

"And about then we're due to fall in with the *Quickstep*," I observed.

Captain Ezra nodded and sat silent for awhile. Presently he reached for the binoculars.

"It's a funny thing about that green," he said as he twirled the focus screw and swept the coast ahead. "Nobody seems able to explain it. The professor gives a long spiel on hot and cold layers of air and the laws of reflection and refraction. He'll tell you all about the spectrum, too; but he can't explain about the missin' green. And he hasn't got a word to say about the ships cruisin' upside down in the sky."



ONWARD the *Cora B.* skimmed toward the pseudo-highlands, and gradually the false point assumed its correct color and height. Green appeared on either side of the low promontory, and soon the skipper gave orders to starboard the helm and make for our anchorage. Now almost constantly he used the binoculars.

"That rocky pile stickin' out o' the water," he said after a little—"give it a good berth to starboard."

I luffed slightly, and soon a system of reefs guarding a natural harbor appeared.

"Depot Island," Captain Ezra said, waving toward the rocky islet now on the beam. "And yonder," he continued, "lies the safest place for Winterin' between Repulse Bay and Marble Island."

As the islet passed toward our quarter the view widened, and suddenly I saw Captain Ezra stiffen and look intently through the glasses.

"Port!" he ordered gruffly; and quickly the bow of the sloop swung away from what seemed to be the natural entrance.

"Steady!" he called now; and instantly I "met her" and headed for a cluster

of light colored objects visible against the green of the shore.

"Steer small!" came the next command.

I complied. My eyes riveted on the grayish objects, I held the sloop true on her course, risking no side glances to seek the cause of the captain's suppressed excitement.

"We'll get behind a reef of our own," I heard him growl under his breath, and a few seconds later we were threading a narrow passage lined by black snags and broken water.

A series of commands, a stentorian call for Matt to "tumble out," and soon we were gliding along in quiet waters. Sails down, the engine chugging rhythmically, we made our way to a point well in the lee of Depot Island, where Matt let go the hook and stood paying out cable.

Busy for a moment at the feed valve, I heard the skipper call for another fathom of chain and also caught his "That's well." When I was free to straighten up and look around, I saw a barrier of black reef just astern of us. Over it, a mile away, I glimpsed a strip of beach and approaching small craft. The grayish objects I had been using for markers I now saw was a cluster of conical shaped tents.

An oath from Matt drew my attention in another direction. I saw a long reef just to windward of us, a stout buttress against the crushing forces of wind and water. But on our port beam scarcely a thousand yards off rode a deadlier menace than any offered by nature. It needed no glass to recognize the smart lines of the *Quickstep*, her sails furled, a dory swinging under her taffrail.

"—three, four, five," Captain Ezra finished counting, and lowered the binoculars. "Guess Kelsey told the truth for once," he added, "when he said they left another feller aboard."

For a minute or two we stood looking at the enemy, and then the first of our native visitors claimed our immediate

attention. It was a youth in a *kyack*. His double bladed paddle flashed in the sun as he drew abreast of us and paused bashfully a few yards off.

"*Kimol*!" Captain Ezra called, and waved his arm in greeting.

The dripping paddle rose. The teeth of the young fellow bared in a smile.

"*Kimo, Kabloonah!*" he called back.

A slower moving and much larger *omiack* now approached, and the skipper studied the faces of its occupants.

"I don't see Tukpeetwah," he said, frowning, and then smiled and waved to an old native in the stern.

"*Kimol*!" came in a chorus from a dozen throats, and the *omiack* drew alongside.

With the exception of two half grown boys it held but one male passenger. Feeble, with ropes of white hair tumbling upon the patched silk shirt he wore in honor of our arrival, the dean of the Whale Point tribe of Eskimos shook hands with his old friend.

"This is Kiah, Tukpeetwah's father," the captain explained briefly to me, and then told the Finn to fetch hardtack and molasses.

Quickly now the natives piled aboard, and soon the cockpit was crowded to capacity with an assortment of women and children clad in their Summer finery. Gaudy calico seemed to be the high note of local fashion—one piece garments beneath which I glimpsed with amusement fawnskin trousers and long boots of hair seal. Merrily they babbled, glancing shyly at me from time to time, until Matt appeared bearing refreshments. The contents of the pans now intrigued them. Eagerly they dunked pieces of the hard biscuits of the *kabloonah* into the molasses and fell to crunching the sticky morsels.

Meanwhile a conversation was being carried on between Captain Ezra and old Kiah. The latter, his wrinkled face twitching with emotion, was doing most of the talking. Not a word could I understand. Several times I saw anger reflected on Captain Ezra's face as Kiah

raised his husky voice and pointed toward the anchored *Quickstep*.



"THE schooner got in yesterday," the skipper interpreted for my benefit as the Eskimo patriarch stopped speaking and began eating his food. "Kelsey went ashore right away and tore open the old cache. There was nothin' under the rocks but empty casks. Tukpeetwah and most of the hunters went away a few days ago on a long cruise to the south'ard. After walrus, I b'lieve.

"Kelsey stomped around furious when he couldn't find out anything about the ambergris. He 'n' the Silvas tore through the *tupeks* and terrorized the women. They didn't find even a smell. Then they threatened to torture Kiah if he didn't come through. Afterward they went to searchin' the beach and all around. Kept it up all through the daylight hours and until we were sighted about an hour ago. Then he and his gang went back aboard."

"Does Kiah know where the stuff is?" I asked.

Captain Ezra shook his grizzled head.

"Nobody but Tukpeetwah knows the new place."

"And when is he due back?"

"That's hard to tell. Sometimes they range as far down as Marble Island. When they get a load of meat, they hustle right back. If walrus and seal are scarce, they may be gone a month."

"Tough on us," I commented, reflecting that until the hunters returned we would virtually be prisoners aboard the *Cora B*. And on top of that it would be necessary to keep the strictest sort of lookout, especially during the nights, already lengthening.

Captain Ezra turned to Kiah, and again they conversed. For half an hour or more the old Eskimo amplified his story of what had happened since the sledges pulled out for Fort Churchill many months before. The skipper interpreted from time to time, and during these moments the old native

grinned at me in a friendly sort of way. With his broken and missing teeth, his eyes pink lidded from many attacks of snow blindness, he was anything but handsome, but I felt that his heart was in the right place.

The moment came for making some preliminary gifts, and as Matt and I dispensed beads and pocket knives and squares of gay calico, I discovered that some of the younger women were actually blondes. But for the tattooed blue lines which ran from their lower lips to the angles of their jaws, their smiling faces bore striking resemblance to those one sees beneath the elm shaded streets of a New England village.

Some thanked me in broken English for the trifles. Mothers passed rattles and rubber toys to their babies. Other youngsters blew on their harmonicas. Time passed, until at length the two youths who had been sitting on the coach roof of the cabin caught a guttural signal from Kiah. Immediately they jumped down and hauled in the *omiack* drifting astern. Now the natives piled aboard and cast off.

"Goo'by!" came from some of them. "*Tab-bow-hoodee!*" came from others, including Kiah. The visit was over.

"Blond Eskimos?" Captain Ezra repeated after me as we sat smoking and digesting our first meal at anchor.

Matt had just gone below for a bit of sleep. I was learning fast about this strange country and its stranger people.

"Blond Eskimos?" the skipper repeated softly for the second time.

So unusual was his tone, so long the silence which followed the words, I shifted my gaze from the *Quickstep* to my companion. His eyes fixed on the green Barrens, he was thinking just how to answer my question, while mechanically stuffing his pipe.

"There's a whole lot to say on that score," he said at length. "This particular Innuite tribe ranges as far north as Wager River. From there to Repulse Bay the Iwillik Eskimos are all you'll

find. Blonds are scarce among the Iwiliks. The Winterin' for whalers ain't so good up in their region. On the other hand, down below Chesterfield Inlet where you begin to run into the small timber country they call 'Land o' the Little Sticks', you'll find the Kenipatoo tribe o' the Cree Indian. White trappers and traders and Scotch factors get thick as you work south, and that's mebbe why there's more blonds among the Kenipatoos than there's fleas on a pup."

I saw the light. Captain Ezra broke off to apply a match to his pipe. A whimsical smile wreathed his face as he thumbed down the glowing tobacco and, expelling a cloud of smoke, looked roughly at me.

"Whalers have been Winterin' here for more'n fifty years," he went on "They freeze-in in October behind these Depot Island reefs, and saw out the next July. There's nine long months when there's nothin' to do in a banked-up ship but eat some and sleep more. There's spells when all hands and the cook get sour and won't speak to each other.

"There's often a deal o' fightin' and like 's not a killin' or two. Some go crazy, 'specially in the crowded focsle. When the ice gets thick enough and the hunters all get back from the Fall caribou huntin', the natives build their igloos around the ship. And in these snowhouses there's always a welcome for a lonesome *kabloonah* who's been fool enough to go whalin' in Hudson Bay."

A few long drags from his pipe, a low chuckle, and the old whaler went into some genealogical reminiscences which had to do with blue eyed sailors out of New Bedford and New London, who during the long Winter nights set out from frozen-in vessels for visits in the mound-like huts.

Big stars, the flaming banners of the aurora, had lighted their footsteps. Adventure and companionship had been their goal.

CHAPTER VII

THE FLAG OF TRUCE

A FORTNIGHT of watchful waiting passed, and nothing was heard from Tukpeetwah. Almost daily a dory would put forth from the *Quickstep* and take a party ashore. As for us, we were practically prisoners aboard the anchored sloop. It was our castle, our fortress. The physical infirmity of Captain Ezra precluded leaving him to guard the *Cora B.* while Matt and I stretched our legs on the green Barrens, and to make any other arrangement would be to divide our slim force.

Two hours on, four hours off, the monotonous watches ran on and on until each one of us was about to crack under the strain. All of July had fled, now the shorter days of August had more than half dragged by. It was all very well clipping along the coast of Labrador. The flight through the ice had been interesting, at times thrilling. And so, while we were moving, the time had flown. But now, tethered like a cud chewing cow in pasture, we rode at the end of our cable, loafing, watching the suns come and go.

Kiah came out to us every now and then, bearing news and presents of wild berries and game. Thanks to the powder and lead we had furnished the youngsters for their smooth bores, many young black ducks had been shot. No deer meat came to our larder though, for the does were with their fawns, far in the interior. Even the tougher skinned bucks had passed up the luscious feed afforded by the marshes of the coast in order to sulk in the dryer hinterland where the rapacious mosquitos were fewer.

Kelsey was still searching for the new cache, Kiah told us, and owing perhaps to our presence, had made no more threats to torture him to the point of making him talk.

A three-day northeaster had intervened since Kiah's last visit, and during the blow oilskins had been necessary

for the watches in the cockpit. Green seas had hurled themselves against the black barricade to windward, showering us with foam; but now on the morning of this fourth day the cold blasts had ceased whipping us with salt spray. A warm sun shone on quiet waters, and almost a calm prevailed. Matt had come off watch and was sleeping in his bunk. I was having my second cup of coffee in the cabin, leaving the skipper to hold the deck while I finished my breakfast. Suddenly down through the sliding hatch, Captain Ezra's voice came to me.

"Tumble up, Buck. Take a look."

It took but two seconds for me to leap up the three steps and reach Captain Ezra's chair. I seized the binoculars he held out and focused them on the schooner.

"Kelsey and three of his gang went ashore half an hour ago," I heard the captain say as I twirled the screw. "They left the young feller aboard. He's been cuttin' up strange didoes these last few minutes."

Into the objective field of the powerful glasses the main shroud of the *Quickstep* appeared. I swept her deck in time to see a figure stoop over something near the cabin companionway. It straightened up and then moved hurriedly to the main hatch. I drew the focus still finer. Now I recognized the young fellow who had accompanied Kelsey and the Silva brothers to the edge of the mush-top floe. Had I taken the time I might have counted the buttons on his flannel shirt.

"What d'you make of him?" the skipper asked. "And what was he doin' runnin' around with that coil o' wire?"

"He's pulling off his boots now," I answered. "Acts like he's goin' nutty."

And indeed it appeared so. Most distinctly I saw the young chap wrench off his second boot, rise from his seat on the hatch cover, and shake his fist at the after-house. Then, with what appeared to be a farewell glance around, he mounted the low rail and jumped overboard.

"Damned if he ain't swimmin' toward us," Captain Ezra muttered as he took his turn at the binoculars.

Sorely puzzled, I had no comment to make, but stood watching the distant swimmer. He moved swiftly at first, one arm flashing in the sun as he stroked powerfully. But presently he seemed to tire. Halfway, barely moving, he came to a full stop. It occurred to me that he was either exhausted or that the chill of the water was taking its toll. Automatically my eyes sought the folding dinghy we kept ready to slide overboard.

"He's jest floatin' and restin' up," the skipper said; and with the last word I saw the swimmer again in action.



HE BEGAN with an easy side-stroke, kept it up until the last hundred yards, and then rested again. There was little doubt but that he could make it now, but instead of finishing leisurely, a wild dash marked his progress. At each furious breast stroke his head and shoulders leaped out of the water. He acted as one bereft of his senses, as if sharks were after him. Long before he reached our counter we could hear the painful gasps which accompanied each exhausting stroke. When at length he reached us, he was all in, his last ounce of strength gone. I stooped and wound my fingers in his shirt collar; and even as I did so, preparatory to dragging him on deck, pity came over me. For a mere boy was looking up at me with glazed eyes.

Blood was mixed with the brine which trickled from the corner of his open mouth. His lips were bruised and swollen. Other bruises and lumps disfigured a face which to my mind couldn't have belonged to a very bad sort of fellow. I shifted my grip to the armpits, lifted mightily, and drew the swimmer aboard. Over the coaming of the cockpit he helped ease himself a bit, only to collapse on one of the locker seats.

"God 'lmighty!" Captain Ezra gasped.

"Look at that head. He's been beaten up."

Ugly gashes were visible on the curly haired and dripping head of the mysterious visitor. Some of the wounds were partly healed, others appeared to be of recent origin; but before I could appraise the injuries the youth raised his battered head and struggled into a sitting posture. Not a look did he give either Captain Ezra or me. Instead, while a fit of violent shivering racked him, he stared over toward the *Quickstep*—stared as if expecting pursuit.

"What's the—" I began.

"L-look," he interrupted falteringly, and raised a dripping arm.

Both the skipper and I looked where he pointed, but saw little except the trim schooner riding peacefully at anchor. Her starboard side was turned full toward us. Between us lay a thousand yards of almost unruffled water. An inarticulate grunt, and Captain Ezra passed the binoculars to me. I adjusted them and swept the rail of the schooner. There was a wisp of smoke curling out of the galley stovepipe. It was the only sign of life aboard.

A gruff question from Captain Ezra, a moan of disappointment from the watching youth, and then suddenly in the objective lenses of my glasses a miracle was wrought. Like a dry cigar broken in two, the *Quickstep* lifted at a point just abaft her waist. A spattering of objects dark against the morning sky, a veritable geyser of timbers and spars, and the two fragments of what had been a stout schooner settled back into the disturbed sea. Now the crashing detonation came to us. Rocky little Depot Island flung back the sound. From reef to reef the reverberating roar took new angles, rumbling along the low coast until the bluff land at Whale Point gave back a deeper note.

I heard an oath, and turned to see Matt standing in the companionway, his questioning eyes on the dripping stranger. The pattering of wreckage on the water had ceased; the fragments of

the hull were settling still lower. It was at that juncture the visitor gave us his immediate attention and tried to speak. Twice his chattering teeth interfered, but after a faint smile at us he managed a few intelligible words.

"You—you'll not be dynamited n-now," came from between his bruised lips.

"Fetch a blanket and some hot coffee," Captain Ezra barked.

This was soon done, and while warmth and strength were seeping into the poor devil, I proceeded to watch what was going on elsewhere. Groups of natives stood near the water's edge. An *omiack* was already paddling toward the wreckage. The two pieces of the hull had gone down, and now the *Cora B.* was gently rising and falling on the first ripples to reach us. Again I turned my glasses on the beach and swept it until I found the dory which had taken Kelsey and his party ashore. It was high and dry above the kelp line. No one was near it.

"Feel better?" I heard Captain Ezra ask.

The refugee nodded, and then glanced timidly at each of us in turn. His teeth had stopped chattering, and now there was more color on the bruised face.

"Why did you blow up your ship?" the skipper asked.

"I wanted to get even with Kelsey and the Silvas. They've been beatin' me and kickin' me for the last two weeks. I stood it long enough—too long."

"S'pose you tell us who you are, and all about it," the captain prompted.



A PAINFUL swallow, a deep breath, and the young fellow's hand went gingerly to an ugly lump on his forehead.

"There ain't much to tell," he said after a little hesitation, "except that my name's Baker—Fred Baker—and that I don't belong with that gang of murderers." He paused and glanced toward the spot where the *Quickstep* had been

riding so peacefully.

"Go on," Captain Ezra urged him gently.

"I was broke in Provincetown—hungry. I made a round of the wharves and came across Joe Silva. He felt me out about the law. I told him I was ripe for anything, law or no law. So he shipped me as ordinary seaman. I supposed I was on a rum runner till we got so far to the north'ard. I didn't worry even then. I had a berth and I was eatin' regular. But after we ran across you I overheard some talk about shootin' and killin'. That wasn't in my line. I was fool enough to tell 'em so after that day you used the machine gun on the iceberg.

"Kelsey clouted me over the head with a marlinspike. I fought back. Joe Silva and his brother Manuel took a hand. They beat me with a chain. Kelsey tried to dynamite you that same night. On and off I got more kicks and blows. Then we anchored here and you followed us in. Since then they've been searchin' for something valuable ashore, leavin' me aboard to help the cook.

"Today the cook went ashore with the other three. I was to keep up the fire, boil the beef and peel pertaters. 'Twas the first time they left me alone. I got to figgerin' out what you'd do if I got the dory overboard and rowed to you, and thought like's not you'd turn that machine gun loose on any white man that came near you.

"Then I thought of the six cases of dynamite under the main hatch. They got it to blast ice with, but Kelsey was plannin' sooner or later to use some of it on you. I don't know the details, for they stopped talkin' when I was around. Anyway, I got to thinkin' I was a strong swimmer, and that you'd most likely not shoot a feller alone in the water. So I dug out almost two hundred feet of fuse and capped one of the sticks. You know the rest. That's about all—except I didn't know fuse burned so slow."

Captain Ezra regarded the boy

thoughtfully. In view of the blowing up of the *Quickstep* there could be no doubt of his sincerity. Again I raised the glasses for a dutiful peep around.

"Is the cook in with 'em?" I heard Captain Ezra ask.

"Yes," young Baker answered. "He's a pal of the Silvas. I was the only outsider aboard."

The talk went on, but now other developments claimed my attention. Two *kyacks* had joined the *omiack* at the scene of the explosion, and their occupants were engaged in salvaging flotsam of timber and cordage. Not far from us a hatch cover was floating, a seafowl its passenger. Eskimos still lined the beach below their *tupeks*. Again I studied the dory, to find men shoving it off. I counted four in the boat.

Oar blades flashed in the sunlight as two of the gang bent to their work, and now all hands on the *Cora B.* watched the progress of the *kabloonah* boat as it drew near the skin craft of the natives.

"What are they doin'?" Captain Ezra inquired.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"They seem to be looking around for something worth saving. Now they're huddled together holding a pow-wow."

For a few moments longer I watched the men in the dory, and then turned the glasses over to Captain Ezra. Matt in the meanwhile had dug out a tin of salve and was smearing its contents on the wounds of the refugee. I was wondering whether we had an extra pair of boots on board for the lad, when the skipper vented a soft and long drawn out whistle.

"I really believe," he declared, "that they're comin' over to give us a call."

Neither a glance nor a moment did I waste until I had the Thompson across my knees, its full magazine wound and ready for action. Matt popped below and up again, clutching his .45. In the lee of the reef the dory was creeping along toward us. Already it was within range, as indeed the schooner had been throughout the period of our anchorage.

"Hold everything!" came suddenly from Captain Ezra. "There's a feller in the bow wavin' a white rag. I b'lieve it's meant for a flag of truce."

I relaxed a little, but sat ready for any emergency. It was different, however, with the Finn. He hadn't the power of relaxation. A whiteness had spread over his sallow face. His upper lip was drawn wolf-like above his yellow teeth, as he stood tense and rigid near the sliding hatch of the cabin.

"Let's vipe 'em out, Cap'n," he pleaded hoarsely.

But the skipper shook his head.

"Can't fire on a flag o' truce," he said; adding, "Besides, accordin' to the laws of the sea, these buzzards enjoy the status of shipwrecked seamen."

The dory was close at hand now. I recognized Kelsey's bulky figure in the bow, holding aloft what seemed to be a white undershirt. The two Silvas were at the oars, stroking slowly and glancing occasionally over their shoulders at us. Evidently they weren't quite certain of a peaceful reception.

"That'll do!" Captain Ezra bellowed when about a dozen yards separated us.

"What'll you have?" he demanded as the Silvas lay on their oars.

"We give in," Kelsey said meekly. "You can have everything your own way from now on. We got no ship. We got no grub."

"And you're not so popular with the natives, are you?" the skipper said sarcastically.

No immediate answer came, but as Kelsey's roving eyes took in young Baker, the gleam of renewed hatred indicated he had guessed rightly about the explosion.

"Just what would you have us do?" Captain Ezra asked in mock politeness.

Kelsey took him seriously.

"Take us aboard," he said. "We'll turn over our guns and behave ourselves. I won't stick out for my share o' the stuff. All we want is grub and a passage home afore Winter gets us."

"You've got a terrible nerve, Kelsey,"

Captain Ezra called back. "We'd jest as soon take a bundle o' rattlesnakes aboard. You're shipwrecked seamen in a way, but we've got no grub to spare. All we can promise is not to shoot you down in cold blood. That's all. Go back ashore and dig clams and pick berries. Sail down to Fort Churchill. Sail to hell if you like. Get out!"

Still Kelsey lingered to parley.

"If we only had a hundredweight o' hardbread," he pleaded, "we'd—"

"Not an ounce; not a crumb," the skipper broke in. "The only thing I'd give you'd be rat poison. Be off, now. My boys' fingers are itchin'."

A long stare, an oath muttered under his breath, and Kelsey turned to the men at the oars.

"Give way," he growled sullenly, and the dory swung and made off.

The oarsmen were facing us now. I had a clear view of Joe Silva seated on the after thwart, pulling stoutly, but not quite in stroke with his brother. His frozen smile had vanished; his gleaming teeth for once were hidden. Earnestly, almost desperately, he labored at his oar as if he thought distance spelled safety. But the moment came when I saw him lift his head while he hurled strange maledictions at us. His brother Manuel and the cook chimed in; but at no sacrifice to speed.

"Sounds like them Portugee are peeved," Captain Ezra commented as the last of the staccato imprecations came floating back to us.

Calmly he holstered his heavy Colt and reached for his pipe.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HUNTERS RETURN

SHORTER days and longer nights marked the advent of September. The old geese and other waterfowl had ceased molting and no longer dived to escape the guns of the Eskimo youths. Frosty nights and light snows drove the mosquitos away, and reports

came from shore that deer had been sighted in the marshes. But in spite of the prospect of fresh meat, despite almost daily visits from old Kiah with gifts of berries and fat grouse, we on the *Cora B.* constituted a weary crew.

We dared not divide our force by unnecessary shore visits; we were slaves to a perpetual watching which routed each of us in turn from a warm bunk to stand his two-hour trick. For Kelsey and his gang had retrieved spars and a sail or two from the wreckage of the schooner and had pitched a rude tent not far from the *tupeks* of the natives.

What they hoped to gain by lingering at Whale Point was problematical. With Fort Churchill ten or twelve days' sail away, it might be that before leaving they were hoping to stock up with caribou or seal. And on the other hand it occurred to us the enemy might be delaying purposely until after the arrival of Tukpeetwah and the hunters, now overdue. Perhaps they expected events to shape for them so that a coup would be possible.

It was on the evening of September 10th—I'll never forget the date—when I came off watch and entered the cabin for supper. Young Baker, whom we'd come to like and trust, was sleeping in the extra bunk. Matt was holding the deck. I laid the Thompson, my personal weapon, on the mattress of my berth, and was peeling off my jacket, when something about the skipper's deportment attracted my attention. Usually he had a cheerful word of greeting for me when I came off watch, but now he clumped to and from the galley cuddy and the drop table, silent, and with a frown on his face.

"Feeling bad, Captain?" I inquired and sat down to the steaming hash.

The skipper made no immediate reply. He poured my coffee, saw that all the food and utensils were within my reach, and then sank heavily on to the locker seat across from me.

"D'you know what day this is?" he asked at length, staring solemnly at me

from beneath his bushy gray eyebrows.

"It's the tenth of September, I believe."

"Does that mean anything to you?"

I thought for a few moments, then shook my head negatively.

"Then I guess I never told you about Getaway Day."

"You haven't—not that I can remember."

Wondering, I awaited the telling of the little story I knew would follow.

"There's certain laws and rules of nature laid down in this Hudson Bay," Captain Ezra began. "Whalemen and Eskimos learn 'em and obey 'em. One o' the rules has to do with this day. If you're on a sailin' vessel, and expect to spend your Winter at home, you've got to up-hook and run for the Strait not later'n September 10th. That's the limit. Otherwise you're stuck here for another year. If you leave later'n the 10th you'll likely get frozen in afore you hit the Upper Savages."

"We've got a tank almost full of gas," I suggested.

"I've figured on that. It cuts the time some. But God help us if Tukpeetwah doesn't get here within a week. We'd never pull through the gales and the young ice. And if we had to turn back it'd be too late to get down to Churchill."

Thoughtful, I sipped my coffee. Much would depend on the events of the next few days. But Captain Ezra was speaking again.

"Buck," he said in a low tone, "I ain't feelin' as spry as I was when we started. I don't think I could live through another Winter up here. The cold seems to be gettin' into my bones. But that ain't the point. I don't give a damn when and where I go down, but I do give a damn about the success o' this expedition. It's got to succeed. We can't let the professor down. He's got a mortgage to pay off and grandchildren to live for. I ain't got even a parrot."

The future looked dark indeed, but

for the skipper's sake I put on a bold face.

"Put away your wet blanket," I said lightly. "I've got a strong hunch that Tukpeetwah and his crowd aren't far off. I'll bet you a pound of the ambergris to come that they'll show up before tomorrow."

A laugh chased away Captain Ezra's gloomy forebodings, and before he could surrender to them again I dug out the checkerboard and had him deep in a different sort of problem.



I HAD the middle watch that night, turning in at two in the morning when Matt relieved me. There was no moon, and during the latter hour of my trick high clouds veiled the stars and hid the lights of a feeble aurora. Another storm threatened, I thought, as I left the cockpit and sought my bunk.

Contrary to my usual habit, I didn't fall asleep immediately, but lay awake for what seemed hours, listening to the skipper's snoring, brooding over the uncertain outlook. September 10th was the deadline; this was already early morning of the 11th—occurred to me again and again as I rolled and tossed.

What was in store for us? Would it be a lingering death by starvation, by frost in the ice packs of the Strait? Or would the end be short and snappy? A bullet, a crashing on an unfriendly reef? Back through the crowded years my thoughts carried me, and I fell to comparing the present with the past. This really was less dangerous than the trenches back of Souilly, a division of Boche crouching a grenade toss away. At least there was no mud; no fear of a bayonet being twisted in my vitals. And as I went on making comparisons, sleep came to me and found me smiling over the thought that at least I had escaped the punching of time clocks, and that death by starvation or freezing held no more terrors in the Arctic than a like death in one of the big cities down below the timberline.

By reason of my lying awake so long, my sleep must have been profound, for I opened my eyes to find myself in the midst of what seemed to be a riot. Captain Ezra was shaking me by the shoulder. Alarmed, I sat up and reached for the sub-machine gun; when suddenly it flashed across me that the skipper was beaming. Sunlight was pouring through the companionway. The cabin was full of noisy people.

"Get up, Buck," Captain Ezra shouted above a babble of voices. "Your hunch was good. Tukpeetwah's here."

Slowly the good news seeped through the aura of my bewilderment. As I drew my shirt over my head I sensed strange odors. Venison was frying in the galley cuddy. The pungency of freshly tanned buckskin was in the air. Right and left I was now introduced to Kooksiook, Tahangatoo, and other hunters with unpronounceable names, and then taken to the cockpit to meet Tukpeetwah himself.

He was enjoying the first use of a telescope which the skipper had given him, and as he lowered the glass and turned to me I took an immediate liking to him. Of a light copper color, his face like that of the other men, was innocent of tattooing. Above the average in height, shod in sealskin mukluks, he wore a Summer *koolitang* of fawnskin, the furry side in. Long brown hair fell upon the lowered hood. Perfect white teeth marked the wholesome smile he gave me and attended his first words.

"I spik some English," he said, as we clasped hands. "The whaling mens—he teach me. But for long time no whaling mens come to Whale Point."

"There are plenty of *kabloonahs* here now," I said, and turned to meet some of the other Innuits.

There must have been fully a dozen of them, and to each Captain Ezra had already handed a useful gift. Like children, they sat around prattling, admiring and comparing pocket knives and the like. The moment came when the skipper took me aside for a private

word. He was smiling.

"Everything's all shipshape, Buck," he said. "They've been here half an hour. You was sleepin' so sound I thought I'd let you get your full rest. The *omiacks* got in late last night, loaded deep with deer meat from Chestersfield Inlet. The ambergris is safe. You'd never guess where Tukpeetwah made the new cache."

The skipper chuckled and pointed up to windward at the rocky little hummock of Depot Island.

"There 'tis," he declared, grinning, "almost under our nose. Tukpeetwah hauled it there over the ice last February. It's in a little cave he knew about."

"Then we can load today?"

"We sure can. That'll leave nothin' to do but fill our water barrels and up hook."

Elated, I swallowed my breakfast, and then willing hands paddled me to Depot Island, perhaps three hundred yards away. There was little danger of an attack on the *Cora B.* in broad daylight, and even in the event of the unexpected, my gun and glasses gave me command of the waters for fully a thousand yards around.

My feet itched for the land. I thrilled as I stepped from the *omiack* on to a bed of yielding and rubbery kelp, and I daresay I staggered like a man far gone in drink as I followed Tukpeetwah up a rude path skirting huge boulders and piles of up-ended slabs. Hundreds of seafoal took wing and screamed their alarm as we picked our way to a slight elevation marking the summit. I paused for a moment to look around.



THE island were better called an islet, I thought, as I glimpsed its three or four acres of rocks. From my point of vantage the *Cora B.* seemed near indeed. I had but to stretch forth my arm and lay a finger on her. A mile beyond, the cluster of *tupeks* made a tawny spot against the green of the

Barrens. Patches of white here and there were souvenirs of the light snows already fallen, and warnings of the heavier ones to come. But Tukpeetwah was calling to me from behind a nearby pile of rocks. I joined him, and found that some of his companions were already at work opening what, by a stretch of the imagination, might have been called a cave.

Some slabs of slate-like stone had fallen against one another in such a manner that a conical space had been left at the center. Strong hands now toppled over a few of the slabs, and I saw a double tier of bulging leather sacks. An indescribable odor, not particularly pleasant, came from the pile of treasure.

"*Iwik* skin,"* Tukpeetwah explained smilingly as he seized one of the biggest bags and flung it lightly toward me. "Innuits womens make sacks for *kabloonah* cap'n. More better than beeg barrel."

Three hundred pounds of ambergris took up far more space than I had supposed. I began to realize now why there had been no room for it on the emergency sleds of Professor Thurston's party the Winter before. The light but bulky treasure filled one of the waiting *omiacks* and reached to a point far above its gunwales; but laughing, the displaced paddlers piled aboard Tukpeetwah's craft and we took the other in tow. Soon we drew alongside the sloop.

A transfer was now in order. Certain cases of trade goods and presents occupied a curtained-off space in the fore part of the big cabin. We dragged these out and stowed our treasure. The final sack actually touched the forward ceiling of the coach roof.

We rested for a spell, sweating but happy, and now Captain Ezra dispatched one of the natives ashore to extend a general invitation to the tribe.

About that time I found that I craved fresh air. What with the natives

*Walrus hide

and the cargo of precious whale product, the air in the cabin was almost unbearably. I pushed my way to the cockpit and, while watching Matt at work opening up a case of presents, the skipper managed to get in an aside to me.

"'Tain't the ambergis that stinks," he said in a low tone as the natives stood absorbed in anticipation. "It's those damned walrus hide sacks. They don't tan walrus like they do buckskin. They just scrape the bristles off and chew it for a couple o' weeks. Once we get under way we'll dump the sacks and heave 'em over the side."

A buzz of admiration ran around the group as Matt pried off the last section of cover and commenced unpacking. Very shortly the cockpit began to look like a hardware store. Powder in canisters, shot in bags, reloading outfits and knives of various sizes, were among the contents of this first case. A second yielded rifles of uniform caliber. The third and largest case was left pending the arrival of the women and youngsters.

In the lives of the Whale Point Innuits this was a red letter day. Scarcely had we taken our turns eating the mid-day meal before every *omiack* possessed by this branch of the tribe lay alongside. There was no room for the crowd on board. The skin boats lay gunwale to gunwale, their merry occupants laughing and prattling while keeping an eye on the opening of the last big case.

Now the cockpit took on the appearance of a five and ten cent store. Gay ribbons and bolts of gaudy calico passed from hand to hand and into the boats. Sewing kits and strings of beads followed, together with harmonicas for the smaller boys and accordions for a few of the bigger ones. There was a doll for each girl, chewing gum for each man, woman and child. Like children gathered around a Christmas tree, the happy Eskimos surrounded us and admired the gifts.

The afternoon wore on. Volunteers

went after water for our barrels. Through the binoculars I could see the natives land and proceed with their kegs and buckets to a depression in the rear of their *tupeks*. Rain and melted snow had gathered there, forming a small pond of water potable after straining.

"What are our Provincetown friends doin'?" Captain Ezra asked as he left the stifling cabin and pushed gently toward his chair.

"Nothing startling," I said. "They're bunched in front of their tent. Seem to be watching and waiting."

The first of the water came. We strained it through cheesecloth and ran it into the barrel to port. The setting sun found us filling the starboard barrel, and the skipper gazing alternately at sky and sea.

"Guess we can get off at daybreak," he said. "Tide'll begin to ebb jest afore sun-up. No sense wastin' gas buckin' a head tide through these reefs."

I agreed with him, and turned to shake hands with the first of the departing visitors. Rapidly now the fleet of *omiacks* diminished, and "Goo'by!" and "Tab-bow-hoodee!" came back to us across the water.



KIAH and Tukpeetwah were among the last to go. As the old native shook hands with the skipper, not a word passed between them. I believe each felt that he'd not meet the other again—at least not on earth. And Tukpeetwah likely felt the same way about it as he shook the hand of his *kabloonah* friend—his friend through the years. Perhaps there was a lump in both of their throats—I know there was in mine—as the paddles dipped and the *omiack* stole away in the twilight.

For a moment or two we stood listening to the faint sounds which came from the boats strung out between us and the beach. All the afternoon the wind had been hauling into the westward. Now it came gently, directly from shore. I heard dogs barking. Now and then hu-

man voices were audible above the unlovely music coming from harmonica and accordion. A shrill piping pierced intermittently all other sounds. I remembered the tin whistle which Matt had given one of the younger lads. Also I remembered reading somewhere that the high notes of a piccolo would carry farther than those of any other musical instrument. But Captain Ezra's mind was elsewhere than on tin whistles.

"Men," he said gruffly, "I want you to pay strict attention." We drew closer. "Tonight's very important," he continued. "I ain't lookin' for any monkey business from Kelsey; but you never can tell. We're all tired, but two of us got to be on the job till mornin'. I'm takin' the first two hours after supper. Who'll stand watch along with me?"

Three of us chorused willingness, and cutting the cards was resorted to. Young Baker's king was high. He would join the skipper in holding down the cockpit until ten o'clock. Matt and I would then take charge until midnight. They were short tricks, but better so for the sake of wakefulness and vigilance.

There was no checker game for me that last evening at Whale Point. I ate a hearty supper and turned in. The foul smell of the sacks failed to keep me awake. Dreams came almost immediately, and in the midst of spending twenty thousand dollars for a caveful of toys and tin whistles, young Baker's voice sounded in my ear.

"Four bells!" he called, and crossed to Matt's bunk.

I dressed and buttoned tight my reefer. For the skipper's sake I turned the acetylene lamp a little higher, and then sought the fresh air. Matt followed quickly.

"Keep your eye peeled, Buck," Captain Ezra warned.

In the dim light which came through the companionway I saw him thrust the long Colt into the holster at the side of his chair. Then he rose and made his

way stiffly toward the cabin. Young Baker followed, and as the sliding hatch was all but closed, comparative darkness fell upon us.

As my eyes became accustomed to what little light there was, I saw the outer reef close under our stern. The wind had hauled still more, and now the *Cora B.* rode with her bowsprit pointing shoreward. There was moisture in the air—a promise of cold rain or light snow—and with no moon yet and but few stars out, I could feel rather than see the shore. But directly aft of us, just over the outer reef, I could make out the dim outlines of Depot Island.

A double click indicated that Matt had cocked his pistol. He was ready for hostile visitors. And so was I. For perhaps ten minutes we sat in a silence broken only by the wash of the Bay on the outermost reef, and then Matt fell to talking of Kelsey and his crowd.

"Vot that bosun he goin' to do?" he began.

"It's hard to tell," I said, "but I think he'll beat it for Churchill tomorrow after he's seen us pull out. Tukpeetwah doesn't like him of course, but he'll probably stake the gang to meat. They've got a stout dory. And they've got rifles and cartridges."

Matt offered no immediate comment. He spat far out into the water; then sat brooding, until at length I heard a low growl escape him.

"I got tough luck," he said. "I don't see Kelsey vonce more."

"So much the better, Matt. Good riddance to bad rubbish."

Another period of silence, and then the Finn spoke again.

"You know vot I like to do?" he asked in deep chest tones. I could but imagine. I waited. "I like to push the *pukka* in him—*so!*" A stout thumb jabbed me low in the abdomen. "I poosh slow, strong." The pressure increased. "Then I heave—*so!*"

And at the grating tones dripping with hatred and disappointment, the thumb moved upward to my waistline.

"An old Finnish custom," I mused as Matt resumed his lookout.

I knew that day and night, dressed or undressed, a lanyard hung around my shipmate's neck, and that on the end of that lanyard a keen knife hung in a scabbard of sharkskin and brass. Now I thought of my forecastle days on coasters, of the sprinkling of deep water men who had slopped around the world on squareriggers. Many the curious tale and legend of the sea had these old salts brought us, together with ribald verse and unprintable chanteys. And always in their yarns the Finn sailor figured as a sullen and moody fellow given to strange likings and hatreds, ever quick with the knife—not to thrust, as other men thrust, but to disembowel.

This train of thought brushed old memories. A favorite chantey, long in the limbo of disuse, occurred to me. I hummed the tune softly. The words took shape.

"Sally Ann, I love your daughter;
What ho! the Rolling River.
I love the—"

Abruptly I stopped, for it seemed to me I heard sounds from the direction of the beach. Matt heard them too. In the dim starlight I saw him sit erect and cock his head in a listening posture. The sounds grew louder and more distinct. A boat was approaching; and judged by the rhythmic swish of paddles, the absence of oars clumping in the thole pins of a dory, it had to be a native *omiack*.

Tukpeetwah, maybe, with a message for us—a parting gift of silver fox or musk-ox robe. Perhaps old Kiah or one of the babies had been taken ill, and *kabloonah* counsel and remedies were in order. These and other possible explanations occurred to me as the *omiack* swept boldly toward us. It was fifty yards away, when with gun ready, I challenged—

"Who comes?"

"Tukpeetwah," came downwind with

guttural accents, and the *omiack* began the swing to lay alongside.

I thumbed the button of the flashlight treasured for such emergencies, and in the feeble rays of its stale battery I glimpsed four paddlers in fawnskin *koolitangs* with hoods raised against the chill of the night. All suspicions—if indeed I had any—vanished, and as the gunwale of the boat rubbed gently along the upper strake of the *Cora B*, I leaned over the coaming to give a hand to the boarder abreast of me.

Slowly, very slowly, he laid down his paddle. And then, like a mammoth jack-in-the-box, the hooded fellow uncoiled himself and leaped up at me. I staggered back, lifting almost bodily the owner of the thumbs which were sinking into my throat. The useless gun and flashlight fell clattering upon the cockpit grating. I heard a hoarse cry from Matt, a scuffling, a blow as of some one smiting a ripe melon—then a dozen auroras flamed, paling all else. The exquisite pain left me. The end of the world had come.

CHAPTER IX

MAROONED

THE auroras began again, changing quickly to rings of fire that floated upward in steady procession. This phase passed, and gradually the roaring in my ears took on the sound of human voices. My mouth was parched, my tongue seemed paralyzed, my throat hurt me beyond describing, but as I opened my eyes and peered around, I sensed that I wasn't seriously hurt, and was lying on the cabin floor. Directly across from me I saw a figure in a *koolitang* stooping over the prostrate form of Captain Ezra, throwing half hitches around the latter's ankles. The hood of the fawnskin garment had been flung back, and as its wearer straightened up from his task I recognized Joe Silva.

Dry sobs came from a point near my

feet. I managed a look in that direction in time to see a mukluk thud against young Baker's ribs. My eyes ranged upward, and I saw that the sealskin boot belonged to Kelsey.

"Shut up!" he called savagely to the whimpering boy, and then turned to yank down the curtains between the cabin and what in a cargo carrying boat would be the hold.

The stench of walrus hide grew stronger, and as with a grunt of triumph Kelsey drew a knife and slit one of the sacks, I looked around for Matt. A dark faced fellow I presumed to be the cook was turning our acetylene lamp higher, and in the clear light I glimpsed not only Matt lying bound and crumpled at the foot of the little companion-way, but saw Manuel Silva standing near the partition edge of the galley cuddy. He had been rummaging, and among our stores had found a prize.

"Look who's here," he called jocosely to the others, and for the second time sniffed joyously at the contents of the wicker covered demijohn he was holding.

No invitation was necessary. Eagerly Kelsey and the others crowded around and took turns sampling the alcohol kept for priming the vapor stove. There followed a gasping and sputtering as the fiery liquid scorched the gullets of the four, and then a search was made for water and sugar. They found both, and in addition a bottle of vanilla extract with which they flavored their diluted and sweetened drinks.

"If it were only wood alcohol—"

The cruel thought came to me as Kelsey, tin cup in hand, approached Captain Ezra's bunk and gave a savage tug at the wisp of gray beard showing beneath the skipper's chin.

"You old bum," he said, leering down at his victim, "you'd give us rat poison, sez you. An' that's all. We ain't so hard hearted. D'you know what we're goin' to give you?"

No reply came from Captain Ezra. His gray eyes roved from face to face,

observing, questioning, returning at length to Kelsey.

"You won't talk, eh?" the latter grated, infuriated by the skipper's silence.

A doubled fist, a drawn back arm, and Kelsey prepared to strike. I closed my eyes and tugged at my bonds. It cost me a kick in the ribs from one of the Silvas, but when I looked again at Kelsey I saw that he'd changed his mind.

"I'd put you to sleep," he said, brandishing his fist, "but I want you to listen."

A pause, a long drink from the cup, and Kelsey grinned evilly as he wiped his mouth with the back of a hairy hand.

"Joe, here," he went on to say, "was strong for shootin' you an' heavin' you overboard right away. I figgered different. The noise of shootin' might bring off your Eskimo friends. Thanks to you they got plenty o' rifles an' cartridges. They weren't even anxious about swappin' these *koolitangs* for one of our guns. They don't know we're here, an' they ain't goin' to know—till they hear a big noise right after sunrise. That'll be us. D'you know what we'll be doin'?"

"I can't imagine," the skipper said calmly.

"We'll be holdin' an execution—a machine gun execution—just like the gangsters do. Look here!"

Kelsey turned abruptly to the drop table and set down his empty cup. From my position on the floor I couldn't see what he snatched up in its stead, but as he lowered his arms and one of the onlookers shifted slightly, I saw my machine gun. I now recollected having dropped it in the cockpit. Kelsey's next words and actions were astonishing.

"I know more about these Thompsons than your gunner does," he said as he cast a vicious glance at me and proceeded to disassemble the weapon.

Skilfully and rapidly he worked, whipping off the magazine and detach-

ing the saw handled grips and notched barrel. Intricate twists and polished lugs were no mystery to him, and within the same period of time it takes to tell about it, Kelsey had finished and laid several pieces on the table.

"D'you see?" he asked the staring skipper, and then turned as a gurgling sound reached him.

Manuel Silva and the cook were busy with the demijohn. Kelsey held out his cup.

"Fill 'er up!" he ordered gruffly.

Again he drank deeply and wiped his mouth.

"I'll tell you somethin' you don't know," he then said boastfully, addressing the skipper. "For two seasons I was in the rum business off Montauk Point. It got too hot for me, on account o' one o' these Auto-ordnance babies—" he touched the pieces of the gun—"so while I was layin' doggo I shipped on the *Roamer*. My papers were straight. All the Coast Guard had was my general description. So 'twas apple pie for me. Who'd look for a rum runner in Hudson Bay?"



HE GUFFAWED, then drank again and commenced reassembling the Thompson. His movements were precise but slow as he reversed his motions and finished the task. Last of all he clapped the magazine in place and wound its spring to proper tension. And now it occurred to him that he hadn't made himself quite clear about the "execution".

"Now you see I know my stuff," he said, "an' here's where *you* come in. We're goin' to dump you ashore—not anywheres near the Innuits, but on Depot Island. You won't freeze between now an' sun-up, an' nobody'll come to take you off. When the ebb makes an' the sun's up, we're goin' to up-anchor an' start the kicker. Then I'm goin' to sail by Depot Island an' show you what a *regular* Thompson gunner can do at five hundred yards."

Sweat stood out on Kelsey's forehead as he finished. I was wondering whether it was the alcohol or the fur garment, when he turned to vent a share of his spite on me.

"As for you, you scut," he muttered, "don't think I've forgotten that punch in the nose. You'll see, directly we dump you ashore."

A brief silence followed. The skipper lay quiet and uncomplaining. Young Baker, mere boy that he was, lay quivering under the ordeal of waiting and listening. As for Matt, he seemed to have passed out. Many yards of signal halyards had been wound around his arms and legs, and he lay as dead men lie. I twisted my head for a better view, and saw that the Finn's deep-set eyes were partly open. A trickle of blood was drying on his scarred cheek. But his chest rose and fell perceptibly, and as Kelsey moved around rummaging, investigating, gloating over the heaped sacks of treasure, Matt's burning gaze followed.

The lamps began to burn low. Joe Silva found the carbide and fed it. Under the restored light I noticed that Manuel Silva and the cook had mixed more alcohol and for the third time were emptying their cups. They were all sweating freely now. As I viewed one red face after another, I fell to wishing that the four would settle down to steady drinking. With them drunk and insensible, a way out might be found for us.

But no such luck. A short visit on deck to measure the gas in the tank, an all embracing look around, and Kelsey gave orders to load the *omiack*.

Matt was picked up and borne out first. The skipper came next. It took three of them to manage Captain Ezra's bulky body, and as the bearers reached the foot of the companionway and laid him down for a new grip, Joe Silva protested against this useless work.

"Let's knock 'em in the head an' get it over with," he panted.

But Kelsey had a fixed idea. In-

flamed by the alcohol, his hatred burned anew.

"No," he said sullenly, "they got to suffer. When we asked for bread, this old bum offered us rat poison. The execution comes off like I said."

Growling under their breaths, the Silvas and the cook fell to. There were but three shallow steps between the cabin and the cockpit, but if hearts can bleed, my heart bled as Captain Ezra was bumped rather than lifted up the short companionway. A great wrath possessed me. Again I struggled at my bonds, and accomplished nothing but an increase of pain in my throat.

I don't remember the carrying out of young Baker, but when my turn came it was to find Kelsey staring contemptuously down at me.

"This is the gunner," he sneered, and spat on me. "Be extra gentle with him," he added with a wink, whereupon I was dragged face downward up the three steps and flung bodily into the *omiack*.

Strangely enough the cold air was comforting. In a daze at first, tasting blood which oozed from my nose and lips, I lay quietly inhaling great lungfuls and wondering which one of my companions I was lying on. My wrists were tied behind my back, but my fingers were free. I could feel some one's head, a chin and neck, and as our captors got out their paddles my roving fingers touched a stout cord. I thrilled as I sensed it must be Matt's knife lanyard. Perhaps the enemy had overlooked the scabbard of brass lined sharkskin, the keen *pukka* with the seven-inch blade which hung day and night against the hairy chest of the Finn.

But even if the knife still hung there, I realized nothing could be done at present. To pull on the lanyard, to draw the knife, bound as I was, would win nothing but additional outrage. I closed my eyes and tried to scheme something in connection with the knife. But the problem was too deep for me. Pain drove away all immediate coherent thought. Wide eyed, I lay facing the

stars, until the prow of the skin boat touched the kelp cushioned rocks of Depot Island.



THEY bundled us out and flung us down as if we'd been so many sacks of potatoes. I was thankful for the kelp which eased my fall, and was wondering if Captain Ezra and the others had likewise been spared the sharp corner of some protruding rock, when I saw Kelsey prowling around with our flashlight. The cook and the two Silvas had climbed back into the *omiack* and were growling about their wet feet, but Kelsey lingered for an inspection of the bonds. One tying after another fell under his scrutiny, and at last he came to me.

"Here's the gunman," he said in mock merriment, and flashed the light full in my face.

I was blinded in a sense and could see nothing beyond the glare of the electric torch, but I could smell the vanilla and alcohol on his breath as he examined first my ankles and then rolled me over to look at my wrists. A tug at one of the rope ends, a yank that brought me sitting partly erect, and he spoke of what was in store for me at sunrise.

"You got a blue coat on, Mister Gunman," he said, "an' I'm goin' to bore a string o' buttonholes in it with the first burst. Then I'll attend to the others. When I get through there'll only be pieces for your Eskimo friends to pick up. Understand?"

I had no answer for him. There was none.

"D'ye understand?" he repeated, and shook me violently.

I mumbled something—I don't remember just what—and forthwith Kelsey's whims took a new angle.

"Lemme see your nose," he said, and again flashed the light in my face.

"Remember Provincetown," he grated.

And with the last syllable either a hard fist or a foot in a mukluk struck me squarely on the nose and knocked

me sprawling.

The fiery rings began again; great circles of flaming orange against an indigo background. These melted gradually, and for awhile I lay in utter darkness. But presently certain sounds filtered through the mental fog which enveloped me. I caught the distant swish of paddles, the faint but raucous murmur of voices a hundred yards to windward. Then came Captain Ezra's voice from close at hand.

"Are you hurt much, Buck?" he asked.

"I guess—" My words I daresay were an unintelligible bubbling, for blood was flowing from my nose and running into my mouth. I cleared my throat and finished, "I'm still alive. No bones broken. How is it with you?"

My vocal effort was painful, but a cheerful answer rewarded it.

"I must be tougher'n I thought. Outside o' some bumps and bein' cold, I ain't so bad off as I might be."

"Matt! Baker!" the skipper called now, and was repaid by a throaty growl from the Finn and a chattering response from the boy.

None of us, it seemed, was severely harmed, but as we went on to compare notes it developed that each of us was still securely tied. And sailor men who knew their business had done the knotting. To struggle against such fastenings would be a useless waste of strength.

New noises came floating down from windward. The paddling stopped. So close had the hauling wind swung the *Cora B.* to us that we could hear the thud of mukluks as Kelsey and his gang gained her deck. I rolled on the clammy kelp and, after several stiff and clumsy efforts, managed to sit up. A slanting finger of light from the cabin companionway marked the position of the sloop; and as I gazed, the sliding hatch was pushed back and the finger became a square of brilliance.

Cold to the marrow, the prey of bitter thoughts, I sat and stared at that

square of light. We were tied, partly numb and helpless. Kelsey had the sloop, the arms, the treasure—in fact he had everything but the rags on our backs. And it was all my fault. Morning would come, and before we could look for any help from shore a stream of metal would put an end to us. And Kelsey would sail away. Tukpeetwah and the others would hear the shots and wonder what it was all about.

Later, perhaps, they would paddle out to Depot Island and find our torn bodies. In a year's time the story of the shooting might penetrate as far south as Fort Churchill, and a pair of redcoats be dispatched to investigate. What would they find? Certainly not enough to affect the lives or liberties of Kelsey and his crowd. They'd get through. They'd market the ambergris and squander the proceeds.

And what of Professor Thurston? October and November would drag along. Orange and russet would touch the maple leaves of Noank Town. The last leaf would fall, and with it would go the last shred of the scholar's hope.

And it was all my fault! Over and over again the bitter self-accusation recurred and ate like acid. My physical sufferings were forgotten.

Gladly, most willingly, I'd have given my life to pay for my mistake. I closed my eyes and writhed futilely. Then I lay still, listening to young Baker's chattering teeth. Captain Ezra's good natured growl broke the silence.

"Moon's showin' a leg," he commented bravely, using exactly the tone he might have employed had he been seated in his comfortable chair.

I opened my eyes and twisted my head for a look. Over toward the Labrador side a hangnail of ghastly yellow was stealing into view. True, I thought, the moon was rising, and it would be the last moon—

And suddenly I stirred and faced the *Cora B.* Every fiber of my bruised body tingled. For hope had been reborn in me. I had a plan!

CHAPTER X

AGAINST HEAVY ODDS

SOME plans are the result of long and patient thinking; the dovetailing of certainties into probabilities; choosing, discarding, fitting the items into a polished whole. Other plans—and some of the most successful—by virtue of strange mental processes, rush full fledged into the human mind. Of this latter sort was the one which flashed upon me. It might be likened to a chain—a cable reaching down into the unknown—yet capable of holding us off the rocks of certain destruction. And like a chain, my plan had many links. If one were to give way, we were lost.

"Matt," I called, intent on the first link of the chain, "will you try to roll over and face me?"

"Aye," the Finn muttered, and gathered himself for the effort.

A space of six or eight feet lay between us. I drew up my knees, and like an inchworm began to work toward him. My progress was slow, the kelp slippery, but at last our bodies met and I proceeded to broach the first part of my scheme.

"I think you've still got your knife, Matt," I said in the husky whisper which I found spared me pain. "I'm going to turn my back to you and edge up to where I can get my fingers on the lanyard. If I can draw your knife I'll hold it as steady as I can. When I give the word you work your wrists so's to saw through the rope."

A grunt of understanding came from the Finn. I rolled over, clenching and unclenching my thumbs and fingers. A bit of life came to them. I found the cord and, pulling it up a few inches at a time, thrilled to the touch of the *pukka* handle. It was a simple matter to work it out of its scabbard, but difficult to grip and hold firmly enough for our purpose. My will was powerful, but my fingers stiff and numb. Twice the precious tool fell, and I had to grope care-

fully for it in the snake-like weed.

But for the keenness of the blade my first link would have failed. As it was, scarcely had Matt begun his third attempt before a throaty growl of triumph came from him.

"By golly, I make it!" I heard him say, and a freed hand plucked the knife from my failing grasp.

A stroke or two at his ankles, and he knelt by my side and plied the knife. I was free, even before Captain Ezra sensed that something unusual was going on. A question from him was answered by the slash of the knife across his bonds. Then came young Baker's turn.

There was no time to lose. I struggled to my feet and rubbed alternately my wrists and ankles. Then I threshed my arms, stamped my feet, and when I felt able to walk without a tumble, crossed over to where Matt knelt chafing the skipper's bare ankles and feet. Abruptly I broke the news.

"I've got a scheme," I said. "It's maybe a hundred to one against me, but it's better than shivering here for the rest of the night—and with bullets for breakfast."

In the dim light of the stars and the young moon I saw the pair stare blankly at me. Young Baker dragged himself near. All three of them hung on my next words.

"The first thing to be done, Skipper," I went on, "is to get you up to that so-called cave. You and the others'll be safe from gunfire if I fail. And Tukpeetwah may take a hand. Come on; let's go."

I stooped and helped Matt get Captain Ezra on his feet. We found the rude path and began the short climb. It was awkward, for the way was tortuous and the light none too good, but at last we reached the up-ended slabs and eased the skipper to a seat.

"What are you aimin' to do?" he asked me for the third time.

I answered now.

"I'm taking a swim."

"But you can't make the shore. The water's too cold. You'll—"

"I'm not going ashore," I broke in. "I'm swimming out to the *Cora B.*"

During the silence that followed my declaration I drew off my heavy coat and flung it over the skipper's bare feet. I might not need the coat again, I mused grimly; and if I did, I'd get it back. And in the meantime Captain Ezra would enjoy having more than his underclothes and an old fashioned flannel nightgown.

"Are you plumb looney?" the skipper demanded gruffly when he found his voice.

"Listen," I answered, for during the brief period of silence the wind had brought significant sounds to me.

All gave their attention and looked down upon the patch of light which marked the sloop's position. And now they heard as well as I the muffled tones and faint rattling of pans and crockery.

"They're goin' to have a feed o' deer meat," the skipper commented.

"And a few drinks while the cook's busy," I added as snatches of song came floating up to us.

"Even so, Buck, you can't do anything empty handed. It's best for us to stick together and—and take what comes."

"Nothing doing, Skipper," I disagreed. I was getting cold. I was anxious to be off, but felt a bit of explaining was due. "Here's the situation," I continued. "I got you into this mess by letting that gang come aboard. Guess I must have been a little sleepy. So it's up to me to make good. That alcohol helps wonderfully, for even if they don't drink themselves helpless, they won't dream of keeping a lookout. And while they're stuffing and drinking below, that's my chance to crawl aboard and sneak over to that chair of yours. If they haven't spotted—"

"My pistol!" Captain Ezra exclaimed.

"That's it. If the Colt's still there, we win. If they've spotted it, I can't tell what'll happen. Anyway, I'm off now.

I'll leave my shoes down near the water. Maybe they'll fit Baker. They're not big enough for you."



I FORCED a laugh and crossed to where young Baker crouched shivering.

"Take good care of Matt and Captain Ezra, kid," I said, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"So long, Skipper," I tried to say lightly as I grasped his sound hand.

I daresay my words were unintelligible, for there was a lump in my throat—a lump which grew bigger as the bony fingers closed over mine and a blessing fell from lips unused to quivering.

I turned to look for Matt, and found him pulling off his jacket.

"What—" I began. But indignant words blocked my query.

"You take me vor sucker, Mr. Buck?" the Finn rasped, and tossed his jacket to Baker.

With a single bound he then ranged himself alongside me, his rising and falling chest sending the breath whistling through his nostrils.

"I go vid you," he declared stoutly.

"But there's only one pistol," I protested. "And two of us climbing aboard means more—"

"To hell vid der pistol," the Finn snarled contemptuously. He clapped a horny palm to his chest. "Ain't I got my *pukka*?" he demanded savagely as his fingers closed on the knife scabbard.

A harsh laugh, and one of his ape-like arms flashed toward me. Involuntarily I started back, but as gently as a falling leaf Matt's fingers brushed along my half raised forearm.

"You dunno der *Suomalina*, der Finlander, Mister Buck," he said. His tones were soft, but eloquent of smothered passion. "I been *Suomalina*," he continued proudly. "I go aboard easy—like a cat. I look down der scuttle—easy. Den I jump for Kelsey."

The final words were hissed rather than spoken, and with their utterance Matt's fingers sank deep into the flesh

of my arm. For a moment he stood rigid, the wild blood of his Tartar forebears coursing hotly through his veins. Then he flung my arm roughly away and went limping down the path.

There was a little more light now. I followed as rapidly as possible, the prey to certain misgivings. It was good to have Matt along, but necessarily the dangers of detection would be increased. There seemed no help for it, however, and as I joined the Finn at the water's edge I had to content myself with the voicing of certain cautions.

"Let's keep together," I proposed, "and when we crawl aboard, don't careen her. They might notice it. We'd better take the bobstay and pull ourselves over the bow."

A grunt of assent came from the Finn. The last rag of clothing fell from him, was balled up and tossed on the dry kelp above the waterline. Quickly I followed suit, and as we stepped together into the ice cold water I tried my best to exact a promise from him.

"Matt," I said, laying a hand on his hairy forearm, "don't gum everything up by jumping into that cabin before I get the pistol. Promise me to wait till we both get set."

An inarticulate growl answered me, then together we waded in and struck out for the sloop. The benumbing and partly bewildering effect of the plunge over, an agreeable surprise came, for scarcely had I taken a dozen strokes before a sensation of warmth stole over me. But quickly I realized the deceptive nature of the comfortable feeling. It was warm by comparison only. The water was less cold than the air. But even so, no human being could swim long or far in water so close to the freezing point. All too quickly the sensation of warmth would melt and blend with the numbness which precludes all motion and stills the heart.

Little by little I increased my stroke. The dried blood on my face dissolved, and now the salt brine stung my bruised and cut features. A hundred

yards were gained, and I tired. For a few seconds I trod water and looked for Matt, to find him less than a dozen feet away. He saw me, and with long swift strokes drew rapidly near.

"Just resting," I managed to say, and again struck out for the patch of yellow light.

From then on Matt kept closer to me, and I recognized him to be by far the better swimmer. Ages seemed to pass and exhaustion began to blunt my finer sensibilities. I became a tired, fearful soul creeping along an endless road toward foes in ambush. Momentarily I expected a stream of bullets. I felt no cold, but again there were thumbs sinking into my throat. My heart pounded violently. I wanted so to stop and rest. But doggedly I swam on and on—and more slowly with each passing yard.

I take no credit for what followed, for I remember losing all interest in everything save rest. Nothing else mattered. But as my conscious will faded, some other force took hold and drove me through the water. I floundered rather than swam. In the throes preceding utter exhaustion I don't pretend to recall exactly what happened, but of a sudden, at a forward fling of my right arm, my fingers touched something hard and smooth. Desperately I clung to it, sensing vaguely that I was gripping metal. Yet it supported me. I pulled ever so gently, and found my head leaving water. I took hold with my other hand, then relaxed in precious rest.

Gradually my heart stopped pounding, and the great drafts of cold sweet air worked their miracle. Revived, partly rested, I looked around and realized I was clinging to the cable of the *Cora B.* at the point where it entered water. Above me the chain curved toward its hawsehole. And there in the shadows, his naked feet planted on the bobstay, one arm hooked around the bowsprit, I saw the Finn. A faint streak of light from one of the cabin

ports touched his face, and I saw he was looking down at me.

"Come on," he whispered hoarsely, and stooped to extend a hairy arm.

I reached and tugged and drew myself alongside him. Immediately the wind took effect on my nakedness. What was to be done had to be done quickly, I reasoned as shivers ran up my spine. I peered aft into an empty cockpit.

"I go to port; you go to starboard," I breathed, and grasped a stop of the furled jib.



LIKE thieves in the night we drew ourselves over the bow and crawled aft toward the coaming. On the far side of the coach roof Matt was lost to view. I didn't see him again until after I'd worked myself like a worm past three lighted ports I dared not explore, and then I glimpsed him peeping down the companionway. Reflected light from below shone on his scarred face, and brief as was my glance I saw him stiffen and whip an arm to his chest.

Speed was the essence of safety, flashed through my mind, as did the thought that what little noise I'd make would be drowned by the sounds made by the gang below. The skipper's chair was but ten feet away. I stepped lightly over the coaming, and moved quickly toward it. The holster was still there, lashed beneath the arm rest, but its flap was fastened. My heart beat wildly as I flipped it back. The Colt was there, just as Captain Ezra had left it. One great bound of my heart and I seized the gnarled grip of the .45 and whipped it out.

To this day I associate the odor of fried venison with the flat grip of a Colt automatic. For such was the odor which met my nostrils as I dashed back across the cockpit and looked down the companionway. Smoke hung blue down there from pipes and cigarets, and to judge from the hissing of the Primus stove and the cook bending over his

pans, the feast was still on.

I paused for a second or two to get the lay of things, and in that period a change came. A panful of meat fell clattering to the floor of the galley cuddy and lay there smoking. An ominous silence followed, then Kelsey's voice rang out.

"You drunken swine," he roared from his seat at the table. "Stand up."

The cook straightened and stood weaving drunkenly, his mouth half open, a stupid look on his dark face.

"We don't need you," Kelsey went on, "an' anyway we ain't got grub enough for four."

Scarcely had the last word left his lips before he reached into the berth just behind him and grabbed my machine gun. One call of terror from the doomed cook and a series of flashes spat from the muzzle of the leveled gun. It was a short burst of five or six, but the rapid work of an accomplished machine gunner. So quickly had it happened that neither Matt nor I could have sensed the murderous action in time for interference. Now, as if by mutual consent, we waited for Kelsey to put away the gun.

"Good work; we get his share," commented Manuel Silva, sitting across table from Kelsey.

His meat laden fork, suspended in midair, finished the journey to his mouth.

Joe Silva, sitting at Kelsey's left, bared his white teeth in a grin of approval.

"He won't talk now," he said as Kelsey replaced the gun and got to his feet.

Our moment was at hand. Mechanically my thumb depressed the safety latch of the pistol. Already, like a good soldier, I had seen to it that the cocking piece was back and ready. Matt stirred with me, but as we were about to leap below—I toward the Silvas, Matt for his old enemy—Manuel Silva stepped unexpectedly to Kelsey's side to join him in a cursory inspection of the dead.

A low growl escaped Matt. His road was far from clear, but he'd waited as long as he could.

"Look out for der gun," he shouted over his shoulder at me. With knife held low, he leaped toward the two men.

I might have been justified in shooting Joe Silva without warning, but it so happened it wasn't necessary; for as a hoarse command came from me and my cold finger felt for a light touch of trigger he snatched up the Thompson. I aimed beneath his armpit and pulled gently. But to my horror I felt no trigger. The tips of my fingers had grown numb with waiting. The deadly muzzle swung toward me, covered me, and in that instant I tugged desperately at the place where the trigger should be and dropped to the floor.

I heard but one report, and with it something stung my naked shoulder. But my Colt had kicked up. And even as this latter fact flashed across me the heavy Thompson fell clattering, first into the dishes on the table, then to the cabin floor. I scrambled to my feet in time to see Joe Silva's last movement. He had leaned back seemingly and had chosen an ambergris sack for a pillow. One limp arm swung to and fro. He grinned, even in death, and as I turned from glimpsing the small blue hole between his open eyes it was to find that the laugh might yet be on the rightful crew of the *Cora B*.



FOR Kelsey himself was on me, and on his way to retrieve the gun. Something had gone wrong with Matt's surprise attack. Throaty noises and scuffling sounds came from the corner aft, but they meant little to me, for I was held as in a vise. Two arms with sinews apparently made of piano wire were wrapped about me. The sickening odor of vanilla and alcohol was in my nostrils. A hot, foul breath fanned my cheek.

I was no weakling, but in the grasp

of such a powerful brute I might as well have been a slip of a boy. Back and back Kelsey forced me toward Captain Ezra's bunk. The acetylene lamp hung there. I heard a sizzling and smelled my flaming hair, and for an instant wondered vaguely if Kelsey expected to burn me to death. But it wasn't that. The pressure came from a different angle now. I was forced down and bent backward across the edge of the bunk. I stiffened and tried with every ounce of my strength to stave off what I knew him to be attempting. He'd break my back. Then with gun or pistol—

A shout from the corner, an excruciating pain in the small of my back, and then under the brilliant light of the lamp I had a clear picture of a face stealing closer and closer to Kelsey's shaggy head. An elbow wedged its way between our abdomens, and suddenly the pain in my back stopped. Then Kelsey's head lifted. His arms loosened. His eyes seemed to start from their sockets. Somehow I knew what was going on. A long steady push, and a look of ecstasy came to the scarred and sallow face of the Finlander. I felt an upward lifting—and Kelsey fell away from me.

Something moved spasmodically on the floor. I closed my eyes and sank weakly to a seat on the edge of the skipper's bunk. Matt's words came faintly to me.

"I been here before," I heard him say, "but my *pukka* hit a tobaccer box in dat Silva feller's pocket."

It was all plain to me now. Matt's first stroke had been useless. He'd not been able to reach Kelsey. And when the latter had heard the shots and rushed for the gun, he had first to overpower me.

The dying man still moved and thrashed his arms about. Calmly the Finn turned his back on the spectacle and grinned at me.

I fell to wishing that the movements on the floor would cease. Almost against my will I looked down in time

to see twitching fingers feeling along the stock of the Thompson. They grasped it, and in the throes of death the finger of the gunner found the trigger and hooked around it. Before I could do more than spring and set my bare foot on the barrel, the deafening staccato of the gun began.

Wicked slivers flew from the floor, but, with neither brain nor eyes behind the sights, no serious harm was done. Sacked ambergris stopped practically every shot. And somewhere along about the middle of the lengthy burst, Kelsey's soul passed. But still the Thompson stuttered on and on, a dead finger curled around the trigger.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST BARRIER

AN EQUINOCTIAL gale drove us east and a bit to the northward. Four parlous days and nights, and the wind dropped to an icy breeze which sent us bowling along at a steady gait toward the channel named after Captain Elnathan Fisher. Winter was on us in earnest. The ducks and geese had all flown south. Puffins, murrelets and other diving sea birds were the only living things we saw on the sullen reaches of steel-gray water.

It was early in the morning of the fifth day after certain burials and scrubblings that I lay in my bunk dreaming. The skipper and Matt, now swathed in fawnskin *koolitangs*, held the deck and were keeping sharp lookout for the landfall of Southampton Island. I had fallen asleep thinking of the particularly brilliant display of the aurora, but curiously enough its purple and crimson banners brought no color to my dream thoughts. Instead they dwelt on ambergris.

This precious substance, with little odor of its own, had the quality of fixing and preserving any other scent, in a way making such fragrance permanent. Professor Horatio Thurston

was a chemist in my dream, a dispenser of fragrance to all the world. To a procession of women he gave costly vials of rose and violet essences. First in line was a Spanish girl in gay mantilla. An Eskimo maiden followed, her tattooed face wreathed in smiles. A sing-song girl from the Foochow Road of Shanghai came next. Other girls in costumes strange to me sang thanks and praises. But suddenly the volume of sound swelled, harshened, and became an infernal sawing noise that sent the dream girls shrieking away. I awakened to actualities.

Something was tearing and chewing at the bow of the *Cora B*. She was trembling to the thrust of her propeller. Sleepy young Baker voiced the question that was running through my mind.

"Ice," I told him, then dressed hurriedly and went on deck.

For a few seconds the dazzling brilliance of sun on snow and ice blinded me, but eventually I squinted ahead and saw ice as far as the eye could reach. Off to port white hummocks and swellings marked the *terra firma* of Southampton. Astern, a long black lane showed where the sloop had eaten her way.

"Mornin', Buck," the skipper greeted me, and waved a mittened hand.

He seemed not seriously concerned. I glanced toward Matt, to find him likewise apparently unworried.

"Won't this young ice chew a hole in her?" I asked the skipper.

He shook his hooded head.

"The copper sheathin' on the cut-water's good for a coupla more mile. We're in the narrer part o' the channel where it catches over first. If the ice don't get any thicker, an' our gas holds out, we'll cut through. Then there won't be any more ice atween us an' Noank."

Fascinated, I stood for awhile and watched Matt's steering. He was using neither compass nor hummock ashore, but with his eyes turned astern was de-

pending on a straight wake for a direct course. I plumbed the gas tank.

"Eight gallons left," I reported.

"It'll be enough, I reckon," the skipper returned.

He raised his glasses for another look ahead. And even as he did so it seemed to me that the *Cora B.* was slowing.

I looked over the stern and saw that the pieces of ice boiling up were no longer of blotting paper thickness. The fragments were larger and perceptibly more substantial. Forward, at the copper sheathed stem, the sawing took on a deeper tone. The craft slowed, stopped, then the bellying mainsail drove her on a few feet farther. The ice had indeed become a serious menace.

"Looks like we're stuck," I said a little bitterly as we came to a full stop and hung with churning propeller.

"Not yet," Captain Ezra said, the glasses still at his eyes. "There's blue water two mile off, an' we got a fair wind."

I couldn't for the life of me reconcile the skipper's cheerful bearing with our position. Was he hoping against hope that some miracle would happen? I knew and he knew that already the ice had chewed part way through the metal at the cutwater. We were not aboard a seaplane. And even if the ice were strong enough to bear our weight, death by freezing or starvation would be our lot on uninhabited Southampton. Coate's Island on the starboard hand would be no better. Had all our battling and suffering been in vain? Could it be that the skipper was merely putting on a bold face?

But it wasn't so. Rapidly now he gave a succession of strange orders. The engine was switched off and the mainsail dropped. I hauled down the jib, and was about to tie the stops when halted.

"Let 'em be, Buck," Captain Ezra sang out from his chair. "We'll need that jib in a little while. I'm goin' to show you a Baltic Sea trick."

Again the propeller commenced its

churning, was reversed, and we retraced our wake. Then, staggering to port and starboard, we made what might be likened to a basin.

"Let her have it easy, Matt," the skipper called, and directly the sloop moved stern first toward her stalling place.

She touched the ice gently. Beneath it the propeller bit its way in clear water. The rudder, free from harm, functioned properly, and slowly the stern lifted and a crunching sound was audible. I saw the principle involved. When the slant of her counter met the ice the sloop was lifted upward. The propeller pulled her, sliding sternward, until by sheer weight she crushed the menace.

Had we been equipped with sail alone, it couldn't have been done. Had the ice been half an inch thicker, I doubt if we could have pulled through.

Time passed, and we approached the end. I looked at Captain Ezra.

"We ain't headed for home, Buck," he said dryly, "but we're gettin' there."

I grinned back at him as we smashed through the last bit of barrier, and found that the effort hurt my lips. Then it occurred to me that although I'd washed myself faithfully and regularly as far back as I could remember, it had been many a day since I'd looked in a glass. We hoisted the jib and sweated up the mainsail, then came my chance, for the skipper had run out of matches. I went below to fetch them.

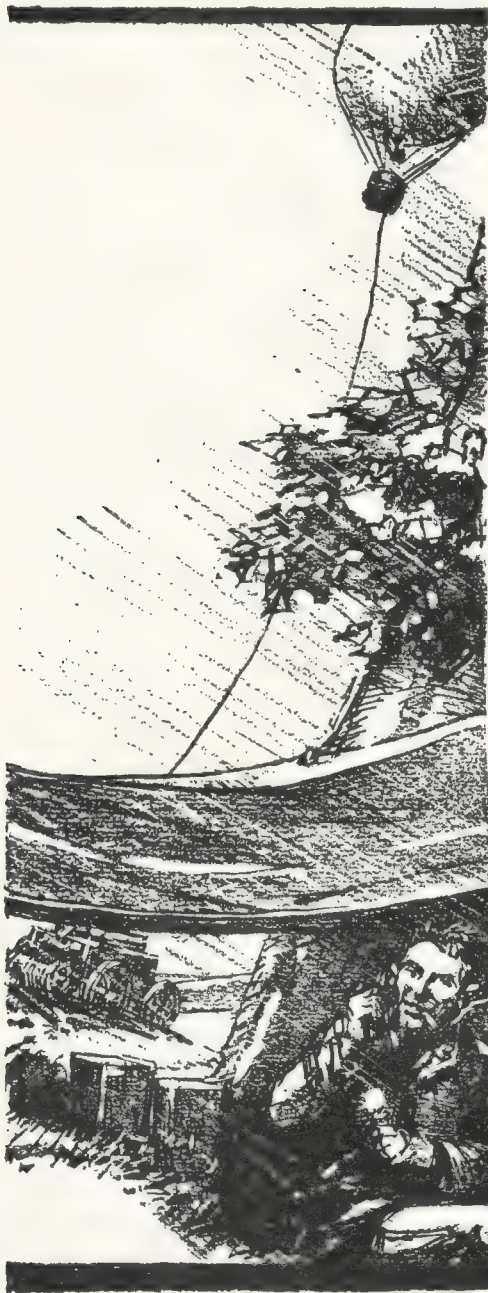
In the mirror hanging beside the companionway I stared at a fellow wearing a stubble of brown beard. His lips were cut and bruised. His hair was singed at the top and one side of his head. His nose, although unbroken, was swollen to comic proportions.

I grinned at this strange fellow, for I knew him to be worth somewhere around twenty thousand dollars, even though he hadn't really earned it. Better still, he was rich in friends.

And what more could a footloose fellow ask?

BALLOON SPEAKING

By LELAND S. JAMIESON



FIRST Lieutenant Gene Sanders, U. S. Army Air Service, stood with Second Lieutenant William Brent, also Air Service, near the punchbowl in one corner of the officers' club at Fort Breckenridge. Each man held a tall glass amply filled, and between gentlemanly drinks surveyed the dancing couples which swayed past them on the floor. They had reached, during the past few minutes, a very delightful state of semi-intoxication.

Outside in the pitch darkness a leaden rain fell monotonously, descending on a bitter wind which had blown endlessly throughout four days. It was Friday night, and the weekly Post dance was beginning. The two lieutenants were in the stag line.

From the southeast the faint booming of the surf of the Gulf of Mexico occasionally reached their ears as combers raked the seawall and exploded thunderously into spray before the vicious northeast wind. Bill Brent, his ear cocked attentively after a particularly

violent impact of water on concrete, turned to Lieutenant Sanders.

"Gene," he said, "listen to that wind." Then, with mild truculence, "The colonel, bless his cast iron heart, won't have me up in that balloon basket tomorrow morning for inspection! We'll be weath-erbound; we'll be earthbound. With that pleasant prospect confronting us, we must get this situation well in hand." He looked out among the dancing couples and vaguely indicated with his hand. "See that blonde?" He made another movement of the hand. "And that other blonde? Twins! We'll go into action, Gene. This storm," he ended, "is very—ah, opportune."

Lieutenant Sanders swung slightly to port and observed Bill Brent from beneath an inquiring frown. Sanders was short and rotund and inclined to portliness. His friend was no taller than himself, but thin, black haired and jovial.

"Either you're drunk or you're an optimist, Bill. Tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock you'll find yourself sitting up in that balloon waiting for inspection, just like every other Saturday morning. Whether the air is rough, the wind violent, the Government in good order or not, you'll be there, your expressed wishes to the contrary."

Bill Brent listened to the roaring of the breakers.

"It can't be," he declared. "I tell you, it's out of the question. I'm no iron man. I can't help getting sick in a pitching basket."

Sanders nodded.

"I know," he agreed. "But does Colonel MacKissick care if you get sick? He doesn't have to get sick with you. I know. I did it every Saturday morning for two years, until you reported for duty here. It's hell, my boy, but it's the Coast Artillery."

If either of the Air Service officers had looked behind him at that moment he would have seen Colonel Harry A. MacKissick of the Coast Artillery, a tall, leathery skinned, white-mustached man,

standing a few feet to one side of the knot of men and women at the punch-bowl, having several glasses filled with punch. But the colonel was giving the two only cursory attention. He watched them for a time, but he could not hear a word they said, for he was almost totally deaf. Bill Brent stared owlishly at Sanders.

"Wanna bet I'm in that balloon at inspection tomorrow?" he challenged. "If it goes up it goes up empty! But no balloon can fly in a wind like this! Old Colonel MacKissick can't make it fly!"

"He will if he doesn't have a stroke of apo—apop—if he doesn't get heart failure. I've been on this detail two years, and I know that colonel, Bill. You've been here just two weeks. What do you know about it, anyhow?"

Bill Brent grew mildly violent in his indignation.

"Nothing! Not a thing. But I know when a balloon can fly and when it can't. I know when I get sick. And I know this: even if he makes it fly tomorrow, I won't be in it. It'll go up empty and I'll hold my telephone conversation with him from the ground and let him think I'm in that basket. T'hell with him! I get sick in rough air, I tell you!"

"Pipe down, Bill. Somebody'll hear you."

But Bill Brent went on, his anger aroused by the mere thought of a morning in the lunging basket in this wind.

"What can he expect? We'll lose our balloon. This wind'll break the cable sure. I'll tell him about this wind. I'll find that old giraffe and tell him!"

Sanders grabbed his arm.

"You stay right here. You'll get in trouble."

Bill pulled away.

"Already in trouble!" he declared.

"Gonna get us out of trouble. Hell of a night for a balloon to fly!"

"You're not going to fly tonight, Bill."

"I'll tell the world. Too much wind."

He squared his shoulders. "Where's that colonel? I'm gonna make him listen to that wind."

Sanders grinned.

"Listen to it?" he echoed. "He can't hear it. He's been stone deaf for fifteen years."

"Well, I'll tell him about it then," Bill Brent declared.

At that moment Colonel MacKissick gave the two a parting glance and went back to his party. He was thinking, as he made his way across the floor, that both Air Service officers were drinking more than official propriety sanctioned.

He had seated himself and, with hand cupped to ear, was deciphering with difficulty what a member of his party was saying to him when Bill Brent, face flushed, one hand holding his glass and the other hanging stiffly at his side, walked like a ramrod from the milling mass of couples and presented himself in such a way that he instantly forced an audience.

Bill Brent stepped, accidentally, upon Colonel MacKissick's outstretched foot, and stood there upon it at attention.

Old Mac came about with surprising alacrity and jerked his foot free, thereby depositing Bill upon the floor with a crash. The glass in his hand shattered, and its contents flooded a small area. The old man came up from his chair as if stuck by a tack and stood glowering down upon the junior officer while the latter got to his feet.

"Drunk!" The Old Man rasped. His voice, in anger, was like the bellow of a bull. "Drunk! By gad, if you're an officer and a gentleman I must be going blind!" His seamed face and scrawny neck were livid. "What do you want?"

"Nothing, sir," Bill declared in confusion. He was, now, very sober. Also, he was anxious to retreat.

"What was that?" Old Mac cupped his hand to ear. "Louder!"

"Nothing," Bill shouted. He was conscious of the lull in the movement of the dancers.

"Nothing *what?*" the tall, gray officer exploded.

"Sir," Bill acknowledged.

"Go to your quarters under arrest.

You're drunk."

Bill Brent forgot himself. This scene had sobered him, but not so much as he thought it had. He was fairly mad himself by this time.

"I'm not drunk!" he contradicted, forgetting rank.

Just then Gene Sanders arrived with a rush and took him forcibly by the shoulders.

"Shut up, you fool!" Gene snarled, and shoved him toward the door.

A girl in the crowd tittered. The orchestra played on in unbroken melody. Old Mac sat down, but his face was still crimson and his hands shook. Gene hustled Bill out of the club and through the rain to their quarters.

"Lord, what a fool you are!" he growled when they were inside. "I thought you had more sense than actually to try such a thing. What happened?"

Bill Brent removed his rumpled coat and flung it angrily across a chair.

"That long legged scarecrow! I didn't see his foot stuck out there. Hell, I was just going to reason with the man. He made me look like a lunatic."

"If you want my singular opinion, you are one. Don't ever try to reason with a colonel. It's poisonous. Why, Bill, he'll put you on extra duty for a month."

Bill shrugged.

"Well—" he grinned, his anger cooling—"I'm under arrest in quarters, anyhow. That's something. I won't be in that skittering basket in the morning. I got out of that."

"You're kidding yourself. Another thing—I'm going to punch your face if you ever make another break like this tonight. We're unpopular enough with the Coast Artillery. I ought to break your neck."

"Nuts! Go on to bed. I may be a fool, but I'm going to show that old scarecrow some things before I leave this place. He can't make a goat out of me, for every sap on the post to laugh at. You'll see."

"I'll see you doing O.D. duty every night for a straight year, probably. Listen, Bill, old MacKissick's been in the Army ever since he wore knee pants, and you'll have to live a long, long time before you'll learn a trick he doesn't know. You'd better forget getting back at him and be a good soldier. I don't like these inspections either, but they're our dish."

Bill Brent laughed.

"You'll get to enjoy one by yourself tomorrow. Haw! Being under arrest in quarters has its compensations. Good night."



COLONEL Harry MacKissick was an old school officer, having been formerly an old school soldier; and if ever there was a martinet for discipline it was he. His hobby—perhaps it was an obsession—was telephonic communications and, coupled with that, he took particular interest in the work of aerial observation in connection with his ground batteries; twice each week he had Sanders put up the kite balloon for imaginary "shoots" at equally imaginary targets far out in the Gulf of Mexico. He had no ammunition; otherwise these shoots would have been real. The ammunition was reserved for use on actual enemies.

Saturday morning inspection was a ritual to Old Mac. There was not a company mess or barracks that escaped; he went over the post with a fine toothed comb. These inspections began at eight o'clock. At eleven, if they had not been finished, he did not delegate his executive officer to continue them, but dismissed his staff, took his adjutant's notebook and continued them himself. It was thus that he came alone to the bedding ground of the kite balloon this particular Saturday morning. It was 11:15, and his round had taken longer than usual and had been more arduous. He was, as seemed his habit, in dark ill humor.

Old Mac's adjutant, at three minutes after seven, had awakened Lieutenant Brent. Rather, the adjutant had awak-

ened Sanders, and Gene had yelled at Bill; and Bill had stumbled to the telephone.

"Hello," he growled. "Yes, this is Brent. What's wrong—is a tidal wave coming?"

"This," said a cold voice, "is Captain Scruggs. Colonel MacKissick has instructed me to inform you that you will be confined to the limits of the post for one month, beginning today, but that you are no longer under arrest. Report for duty as usual for the inspection."

Bill Brent was, by this time, thoroughly awake.

"And you woke me up—er, yes, sir, Captain Scruggs. Very good, sir."

He slammed down the receiver and whirled to Gene Sanders, who was sitting on the edge of his bed, grinning.

"You had a hand in this!" he accused acidly. "You said last night I wouldn't get out of that inspection. I don't mind a joke, Gene, but this is going out of the way—"

"I didn't have a hand in anything!" Gene retorted. "You're crazy as a loon. What's happened now?"

"I'm confined to the post, but I'm put back on duty. It looks like I climb up into the clouds and get sick again this morning. Rats!"

He crossed the room in his pajamas and looked outside. A drizzle of rain still fell from scudding clouds; and the booming of the surf, although not as vicious as it had been last night, was clearly audible from this distance, a quarter of a mile away.

"You're lucky he didn't throw you in the brig last night," Gene observed. "Cheer up. This month will pass. You'll get used to it. After a year or so you'll not mind these Saturday morning rites."

"I'm damned," Bill Brent retorted, "if I'm gonna climb up in that basket and stand there half a day waiting for old MacKissick to come to the chartroom and say a dozen words to me on the telephone. I've had my stomach turned wrong side out the last two Saturdays. If there were any point in doing it, I

wouldn't object so much. But it's just a plaything for his fancy. There's no sense to it."

"He just happens to be C.O.," Gene returned, a glint of humor in his eyes.

Bill tamped a cigaret vigorously, lighted it and pulled deeply. After he had dispelled a cloud of smoke he sat down again.

"Why should anybody ride in the durn balloon?" he asked. "Tell me an answer to that."

"What can we do?"

"I can talk to him just as easily from the ground as from up there; he'll never know the difference. I don't mind sitting up there on a nice day, but this morning—rain and wind and cold as a marble slab! I'll shoot my cookies in five minutes. I tell you, Gene, I'm not going to do it. I'm going to rig up a telephone so I can talk to him from the ground, and put the balloon up empty."

Sanders dressed in silence, thinking of this fantastic plan.

"You will not," he declared at last. "We'd both go to the brig."

"But he won't know anything about it," Bill argued, pulling on his breeches. "All he does as it is doesn't take five minutes. He walks through the chartroom, talks to you a minute and then to me by telephone, looks the winch crew over and goes on back."

"Are you still drunk?" Gene asked. "We'd be saps to try a thing like that. Forget it."

"Saps or not, I'm not going to ride up there in this wind and rain for three hours waiting for him to appear. I feel good now, but I know how quickly that basket can turn my stomach over and spill everything out of it. Hell, Gene, don't be a piker!"

"I'm not. I'm perfectly game. But I'm just not going to let you get yourself—and me—into such a perfectly idiotic situation. Forget it."

Bill Brent looked at his friend smilingly. But he was serious, and he knew that Gene knew he was serious.

"You'd better arrest me right now

then, Gene. But you don't need to know anything about it. For that purpose I'll leave you, and you can come down to the bedding ground late."

They finished dressing. Gene Sanders wondered if, after all, there was anything he could do. He didn't blame Bill for not wanting to spend a miserable morning in the basket of the big balloon; yet he realized only too well what the consequences would be, both to himself and Bill, if a deception of this kind should be discovered by MacKissick. But he knew that he would not arrest Bill; at this moment there was nothing for which to arrest him. He looked at the younger man.

"Don't be rash," he cautioned.

"And don't you worry about that." Bill grinned. "Go on and have breakfast. I may not do anything after all."



WHEN the first lieutenant had departed Bill Brent put on a raincoat over his uniform and trudged through a steady drizzle to the post exchange, where he drank two cups of scalding black coffee and devoured toast and bacon and eggs. He left at 7:30, walked across the parade ground and down a hill behind the post to the bedding ground of the balloon. The chartroom, a small, neat building, stood perhaps fifty yards from the winch, and Bill Brent went there after stopping at the balloon and telling the winch sergeant to get his crew and make the big gas bag ready for the ascent.

"Flying today, Lieutenant?" the sergeant asked, unbelieving. He was Air Service too, and knew something about flying weather; he had been with the balloon section in France. "You'll lose that rubber cow if you put her up in a wind like this, unless we're careful."

"I wish you'd tell that to the colonel," Bill declared, and walked away.

In the chartroom he found a private of the Signal Corps, who was, for the purpose of communication, attached to the balloon company. This man was the key in his plan.

"Morning, Leatherman," he said. "Good weather for ducks."

The soldier grinned.

"Flying for inspection this morning, Lieutenant?" he returned.

"That's Colonel MacKissick's plan," Bill said. "Leatherman, how much telephone wire have you on hand?"

"About a thousand feet, I think, sir."

"Get it," the officer instructed. "I'm going to throw a curve."

"I don't just understand," the soldier said.

"You will. Where's the wire?"

Under Bill Brent's instruction Leatherman tied a line in to his switchboard and ran it downhill through a clump of bushes into an area of scattered brush. He went back then and drew from stock a head and chest telephone set and attached it at the end of the wire under a low, bushy tree. Going back to the chartroom, he kicked sand over the wire, concealing it. He was grinning to himself when he got back to his post at the switchboard. He was anxious to see Colonel MacKissick arrive; he was in sympathy with Lieutenant Brent, but wondered if the latter would get away with what he planned.

Bill, in the meantime, got a winch tarpaulin and went down to the tree and covered the telephone from the rain, returned to the winch and superintended putting the balloon into the air. He was nervous over the fact that every soldier in his crew knew that he was not in the basket, but he cautioned them to silence on the matter, received their promises, and then, with the balloon riding at the end of its cable in the fringe of the hurrying clouds, Bill Brent trudged back to the chartroom. It was, he saw by his watch, time for Gene Sanders to arrive, and he must disappear before his senior officer appeared.

"Leatherman," he instructed, "when the inspecting party arrives, plug the colonel in on the balloon line. You've changed your switchboard hookup so I'll get the call down there?"

"Yes, sir. The balloon line from the

switchboard is dead, and any call plugged in to the balloon will come to you. I hope everything goes well, Lieutenant."

"Thanks. It will. But keep a straight face about you."

"Yes, sir. Of course." The soldier grinned.

Bill left the chartroom and walked quickly down the hill, pausing now and again to kick more sand over the wire, or to conceal it more carefully in the grass. He reached the tree at the end of the line, turned the tarpaulin over and sat down on the dry side of it, his back against the tree, so that he faced the south and could see, dimly in the mist surrounding it, the balloon. He put on the headset, adjusted the chest mouthpiece, gave the hookup a final test and leaned back comfortably. Here, out of the wind, it was not so cold as he expected; he contrasted his position with the retching agony of his rightful place in the basket in the air. He was, he considered, rather clever to think of this. And Old Mac would never be the wiser. He chuckled audibly, lighted a cigaret and listened to the steady, restful drumming of the rain.

First Lieutenant Gene Sanders arrived at the chartroom at 8:30, still wondering whether Bill Brent would have the colossal audacity to attempt the thing he had threatened. Gene's personal opinion was that Bill, when it came to an actual decision, would go up in the balloon. After all, Colonel MacKissick's wrath was a fearful thing; any lieutenant, and especially a second lieutenant already in disfavor, would be wary of incurring it.

"Lieutenant Brent has got the balloon up, I see," Gene said casually to Leatherman, who sat at his switchboard. "Let me speak to him." He watched while the soldier plugged in on the balloon line, and when he saw that Leatherman actually gave him the circuit to the basket in the clouds, the mild tension of anticipation which he had experienced all morning left him. He was glad Bill

Brent hadn't tried to carry out his plan.

"Hello—Bill?"

"Balloon speaking," came a distant voice.

"Bill," Gene said. "This is Gene. How's it going up there? Giving you a nasty ride?"

"Rotten," Bill declared, from his position in comfort by the tree.

He had his raincoat hooded over his head and was, really, nicely situated.

"Boy, you ought to try to ride this basket for awhile. It's going to tear my eye teeth out if the Old Man doesn't hurry up."

"You still sound mighty able bodied," Sanders said.

"Well, if you were up here you wouldn't feel that way, I'm telling you. This is a cold seat in the wind and rain!"

A thin suspicion was beginning to filter through Gene's mind.

"Bill," he said, "I think you're a liar. You don't sound sick enough to be in that basket. I'll step outside and I want to see your head over the rim."

He put down the instrument and went to the door to peer upward through the leaden rain. But after two minutes, when he had seen nothing of Bill Brent through the driving mist, he came back.

"Are you in that basket, or aren't you?" he snapped into the telephone.

A mocking laugh came over the wire.

"You go to hell!" Bill Brent said.

"Bill," Gene asked seriously, "for heaven's sake, don't try this fool stunt! Where are you?"

Bill laughed again.

"You'd get awfully wet before you found me. Now keep your shirt on, Gene, and we'll both enjoy ourselves. I'm anxious to put something over on Old Mac. Don't crab my act."

"Listen, Bill," Gene said, genuinely alarmed, "you've got time to haul that kite down and get in the basket. Come on in from wherever you are and do it. Hurry up about it!"

Bill chuckled.

"Is that an order?"

"Yes, that's an order."

"Well, you go take a running jump at the moon with your order! I'm comfortable and satisfied."

"I hope you choke!" Sanders snarled; he slammed down his telephone and turned savagely to Leatherman at the switchboard. "Where's Lieutenant Brent?"

The soldier looked up innocently.

"Why, sir, I presumed he was in the balloon until just now. I don't see—"

"Shut up! Tell me where he is! You're a liar by the clock. You helped him fix up this stunt, and I'll have you in a court Monday morning if you don't break loose with it."

But Leatherman had promised Bill Brent that he would protect him. He liked the junior officer and admired him for his effrontery.

"Yes, sir. But I'm sure I can't tell you anything about him."

Gene Sanders grinned furtively. In spite of his anger, there were elements of this thing which touched his sense of humor.

"When the colonel gets here, Leatherman," he said, "you do your stuff. We'll have the fat in the fire if this gets out."

There was nothing more Sanders could do until the inspection began. He went from the chartroom to the winch, inspected it, talked with the sergeant and the crew for a few minutes, saw, from their expressions, that they, too, knew what was taking place, and warned them to the strictest silence. He would, he hoped fervently, be transferred to Guam before this story got out. For it would, of course, get out; eventually it would reach MacKissick's ears . . .



MACKISSICK arrived at the chartroom at 11:15. He was alone. He wore a campaign hat, its brim flappy from rain, and a long, regulation slicker that reached to the ankles of his dress boots. He had had a particularly trying morning, for due to the wet weather, the barracks were not as tidy as usual. His notebook was full of tidbits of informa-

tion for use on Monday in preparing memoranda for company commanders.

He walked to the chartroom through the rain, and the men, seeing him coming, stiffened as from electric tension. Lieutenant Sanders, standing in the drizzle by the chartroom door, greeted him.

"Good morning, sir," Sanders shouted, trying to pierce the Old Man's deafness.

"Rotten morning!" Old Mac grunted. "Lieutenant, I'll inspect your telephones."

He brushed by and entered the building. Leatherman stood like a statue at his switchboard.

"Sit down!" the colonel snapped. "Connect me with the balloon."

The soldier handed him an instrument, a combination field type resembling the modern so-called French phone, and Old Mac pressed the button on it and held it to his left ear. Though rather deaf to ordinary sounds, he could hear fairly well the vibrations coming from a diaphragm so close to his eardrum. Leatherman plugged into the circuit marked balloon and said, "Hello, balloon, hello," and waited. The room was very still, except for the wheezing of the white haired colonel's breath. Lieutenant Sanders and Leatherman scarcely breathed at all.

Twenty seconds grew quickly into thirty, while at intervals the soldier repeated his demands into his mouthpiece; but still there was no answer from Bill Brent down at his station by the tree. Leatherman plugged in with another telephone and handed it to Sanders, who had stepped up to see what was wrong with the connection.

They could not know it then, but at that moment Bill Brent, comfortable and warm beneath his protection from the rain, had dozed into a heavy sleep while waiting. His set had no bell to waken him. The soldier's voice reached his ears, true, but he was too deeply unconscious to respond.

Sanders, in a flash of perception, realized the irremediable situation which

would result if this flinty tempered colonel should get no answer to his call. He whispered quickly into the soldier's ear, glanced up to see the other officer and found him looking in perplexity out the rainstreaked window at the dimly visible shape of the balloon. He had, Gene Sanders decided, a slender possibility of getting away with something even more audacious than Bill Brent had tried. Old Mac was deaf! So Gene, with a direct connection to the old man's ears five feet away, began a precarious conversation. He had no idea of why Bill had not answered, and he had no time to dwell on it.

"Hello—hello," he said in a low voice which was transmitted to the colonel's ear. "Balloon speaking—"

He turned toward Old Mac, so that the mouthpiece of the set shielded his mouth and he could talk without the movement of his lips being visible.

"Hello; balloon?" the colonel barked.

"Balloon speaking," Gene Sanders said again.

"What's wrong up there?" The Old Man consulted his huge gold watch. "You've been thirty-five seconds answering your call! You should have replied instantly!" the colonel fumed.

Lieutenant Sanders hastened to reply:

"I'm very sick, sir. This wind is violent. I was—er—getting rid of my breakfast when you called."

That, he thought, some of his confidence returning, should be a satisfactory answer. He wanted, suddenly, to laugh; it was ridiculous to stand here, so close he could almost touch the Old Man's back and make him think the voice was really coming from that lunging basket up there in the clouds! Yet it was dangerous, too. There was almost too much thrill in doing it.

"Sick, huh?" the colonel grunted. "Bad wind, you say?"

"Very bad wind, sir."

"Any danger to the balloon because of it?"

"I hope not, sir."

"I don't care what you hope. I asked you a question. You're a balloonist, answer it."

"No, sir, there's no danger to the balloon, sir."

"What good could you do up there today making observations on a target?" the old man shot back instantly. "What's your visibility from that altitude?"

"Very little good, sir. About a mile, sir," Sanders replied quickly.

"What is your altitude?"

"A thousand feet, sir."

"You look like you're in the clouds to me. Why don't you come down a bit so you can see better?"

"Very well, sir."

Silence settled there within the chartroom, while Sanders, making frantic motions with his hands, tried to make Leatherman understand that he was to call the winch and have the balloon pulled down two hundred feet. Sanders held up two fingers, motioned down; the soldier threw up his hands as a signal that it was unintelligible to him.

"Well, why don't you come down?" Old Mac boomed half a minute later. "What's the matter with you, anyhow? They haven't even cranked the winch!"

"I'm trying to get them now," Gene Sanders said. That really was the truth. But the C.O. stopped him.

"Just a minute," Old Mac said. "Come clear down to the ground. I think I'll go up with you again and study the problem of observation in this thick weather. Might have to meet an attack in weather like this sometime, you know. Pull the balloon clear down."

In spite of Gene's mental agility, he hesitated before replying to this order. For he was trapped! Of course he could not pull the balloon down. To do so would disclose the fact that there was no one in the basket; it would mean a trial for both himself and Brent. Damn Bill Brent! This was all his fault! But he had to do something, and do it quickly.

"I'll try, sir," he said. "But as the

Colonel knows, getting a balloon down in a high wind is a dangerous thing. I may not be able to do it, sir."

"What have you got to do with it?" the Old Man barked. "The winch does it. Give it orders to pull you down. And don't take all day. You talk too much, Brent!"



"YES, SIR," Sanders agreed.

He quickly handed his telephone to Leatherman and whispered:

"Call the winch. Tell 'em to start hauling down on the balloon. Tell 'em I'm coming to help." He straightened just as MacKissick, too, turned to the switchboard to surrender his instrument.

"I'm having Brent come down," Old Mac boomed. "I'm going up with him again."

"Yes, sir," Sanders said. He was almost in a panic. "You're pulling the balloon down—in this high wind?"

"What of it?" the Old Man challenged quickly.

"Nothing, sir. But I'll have to operate the winch. It'll be difficult to get that kite down this morning without breaking the cable. Excuse me for a moment, sir. Would you like to come with me?" He wanted at all costs to get the colonel away from that telephone. There would be hell to pay if he called the balloon after Gene had left the chartroom.

"Yes. Interesting operation. I'll come along. But please explain to me why you must operate the winch. Haven't you soldiers who can do that as well as you? That isn't efficiency. You're an officer in charge of the operation. Must work with your brain instead of your hands. That's a principle of command."

Sanders, in a cold sweat, returned:

"Quite right, sir. But a man on the ground, who doesn't fly, is at a disadvantage on a day like this. He has trouble anticipating what the balloon will do. I don't want to break the cable and lose the balloon, sir. So today I'll operate the winch."

"I thought Brent kept in constant contact with the winch during the operation of coming down," the colonel said.

It struck Gene quite forcefully that he sounded suspicious. But, he thought, this couldn't be. It was his imagination.

"He does," Gene admitted. "He'll work with me. We'll do that to make doubly sure nothing happens."

It seemed that the net was drawing tighter about him all the time. Discovery seemed an imminent danger.

The rumble of the winch motor faintly reached his ears as he walked with MacKissick toward the bedding ground. He saw the cable jerk, heard the engine begin to labor; the balloon, high in the air, started slowly down. They must hurry! It couldn't come down—it mustn't! It was up to him, at any cost, to keep it up there! He hastened his pace, but the colonel lagged to watch. The balloon came down three hundred feet before they reached the winch.

"Now," said Old Mac, "I want to hear just how you do this with the telephone."

But Sanders fled, as if he had not heard the command. He leaped up upon the truck and took over the controls. In a dozen tumbling words he explained the danger to the sergeant.

"Tell him," he whispered, "that this is a terrific wind—you wanted me to operate the winch. Tell him I'm not likely to be able to get the kite down until it dies out some. And, Sergeant, make him believe it!"

The soldier climbed down, and began, a moment later, a shouted conversation with Old Mac.

Gene went seriously to work to make it appear to the colonel that he could not get the big bag down. The Old Man had watched enough descents not to be fooled easily.

But the wind really was strong; during the gusts it was violent. Gene played the winch against the huge lifting force of hydrogen. He raced the winch and the cable whined across the

sheaves until the balloon, from too rapid a descent against the wind, dived. Then he released his clutch and paid out cable furiously to stop that dive, until the balloon caromed in slanting flight back into the clouds.

This went on for fifteen minutes, while Old Mac stood grimly by and watched the process. Gene wished the cable would break and make it appear that Brent had gone adrift. But the cable held, despite tremendous torture. Gene, finally, stopped the winch and climbed down. He looked weary, and he was weary; but he was tremendously relieved.

"The wind's too strong!" he shouted to the Old Man. "I'm afraid I'll break the cable if I try it any more. We'll have to wait until the wind dies down."

Old Mac nodded, looking upward at the dim outline of the big gas bag in the mist.

"Brent, I take it," he grumbled, "is marooned until the balloon can be brought in."

"I'm afraid so, sir," Sanders said soberly.

He wished Bill Brent were in the balloon and had to stay there for the night.

"I'll talk to him," the Old Man said, and demanded the winch telephone, pressed the button and put it to his ear. "Hello, balloon," he shouted.

Now that particular telephone actually was connected with the basket, and not through the switchboard. Sanders could not practise the deception which, in the chartroom, had been successful. He stood frozen in his tracks, fearful of the result of this. The Old Man, of course, got no answer to his call.

After three minutes of shouting into the mouthpiece he flung the instrument to its hook and turned savagely to Sanders.

"This is the most dismal demonstration of efficiency I've ever witnessed! Brent doesn't answer now! What explanation, Sanders, have you for such poor communications?"

"Er—why, sir, I imagine the strain on

the balloon cable has broken the telephone line. The line, you know, sir, runs up to the balloon in the core of the cable. It's easily damaged, sir. And the cable is old. Wartime stock. I'm very sorry, sir."

"Bah! Sanders, I want a complete written report on this whole business. What about Brent? Can't he get down from there? The man might suffer seriously from exposure."

"He'll have to jump with his parachute. I suppose he will, if we don't succeed in getting the balloon down by nightfall."

"See that he does! This has been a very pitiful showing. Terrible efficiency! And it shall go on your efficiency report, Sanders. Remember that."

Gene started to remonstrate, but decided upon silence. After all, he was escaping from a serious predicament. He followed the old colonel from the winch back to the chartroom. They went inside again.



"OPERATOR," Old Mac snapped when they came to the switchboard, "connect me with the balloon again. I may have had a bad connection from the winch. Perhaps the cable isn't broken in the core."

Leatherman, the soldier, plugged in as formerly. Old Mac gave a sudden shout into the instrument:

"Brent! Colonel MacKissick calling the balloon."

Sanders picked up another telephone, to be ready with Brent's end of the conversation. But he was dismayed, and almost paralyzed with fear when he heard Brent's voice, clear and soft, come in over the wire.

"Balloon speaking—balloon speaking."

"What's wrong up there?" The Old Man snarled. "Why didn't you answer awhile ago when I called you from the winch?"

Gene Sanders held his breath while waiting for Bill Brent's reply. What Bill

said at this crucial juncture might seal their future in the Army. Bill Brent, Gene knew now, had been asleep. He didn't know what had taken place in the former conversation. He couldn't possibly get things right . . .

But Bill said, his voice thin:

"Beg pardon, sir, but I've been nauseated by the lurching of this basket. I couldn't answer, sir. I had my headset off."

Bless old Bill! Gene felt reprieved. But only for an instant.

"How do you feel about spending the night up there, now that we can't get the balloon down until the wind dies out?"

"Spend the night up here?" Bill echoed. "Why, Colonel, I'm not going to spend the night up here. I—er—that is, I'm going to jump with my parachute."

Round two for Bill! But Old Mac shot back:

"That's fine. Glad you won't have to spend the night in the rain."

He paused and chuckled softly to himself. His shoulders shook with mirth. But he did not look around at Sanders. He said to Bill:

"Do that now. I've always wanted to see a parachute jump from a balloon. I'll wait right here to see you come down."

Gene heard Bill Brent take a quick, deep breath. And Bill's voice, when he answered, was genuinely thin.

"Why, sir, to tell the truth, I'm afraid I'm too sick to try jumping now. I thought I'd wait until later in the day, after the air gets calmer and I feel better. Jumping with a parachute is hard on a man, sir."

"What's that?"

"I'm sorry, sir," Bill repeated loudly, "But if the Colonel doesn't object too strenuously, I'd prefer to wait. I'm very sick, sir."

Colonel MacKissick laughed outright. "Very well," he said. "This has all been very interesting. I don't know where you are, but it's safe to come in

now, my boy. I hope you haven't gotten too wet hiding out in all this rain."

He laid the telephone aside. He turned to Sanders, and there was a quizzical light in his eyes. The air in the chart-room, it seemed to Gene, had been very close for hours.

"Young man," Old Mac said, "you and your junior officer have been very resourceful in this escapade. I've been highly entertained. You've been original, and originality is always commendable. As a reward for your efforts you could be tried before a court. You understand that, do you?"

"Yes, sir," Lieutenant Sanders said, and lapsed into speechlessness, his thoughts a whirl of unintelligible queries.

The fact that the Old Man knew all the time what Bill Brent was doing, robbed him of any effort at expression. But Old Mac was living up to his reputation; they would both be tried.

"But as an alternative to trial I can offer you a punishment almost as original as your own," he said. "Are you interested?"

"Yes, sir," Gene declared.

"You and Brent can, voluntarily, be

the hosts at the weekly dance next Friday night. It must be a lavish affair. You'll bear all expenses and, of course, all guests will understand your generosity. Do you agree to that? It isn't all."

"Yes, sir." Sanders jumped at the opportunity and spoke for Bill Brent by proxy.

"The other consideration," Old Mac went on, "is that you and Brent are, from this minute, and for six months, on the wagon. Do you agree?"

"Gladly," Gene said.

Bill, hearing this, would not be so well pleased. But a court, he knew, would fine them and perhaps reduce them on the promotion list.

Colonel MacKissick held out his hand. He was actually smiling as he spoke.

"Let this be the last time. I don't think you can put anything over on me. I've been deaf for years, but I read lips rather well. If you make plans for reprisal, don't let me stand beside you at the punchbowl while you do it."

And with that he pulled down his flappy hat brim and trudged out toward the parade ground through the rain.

A Woodsman's Wish

By LOWE W. WREN

MINE is no gentle-wish, with folks about
To pity me the day that I go out.

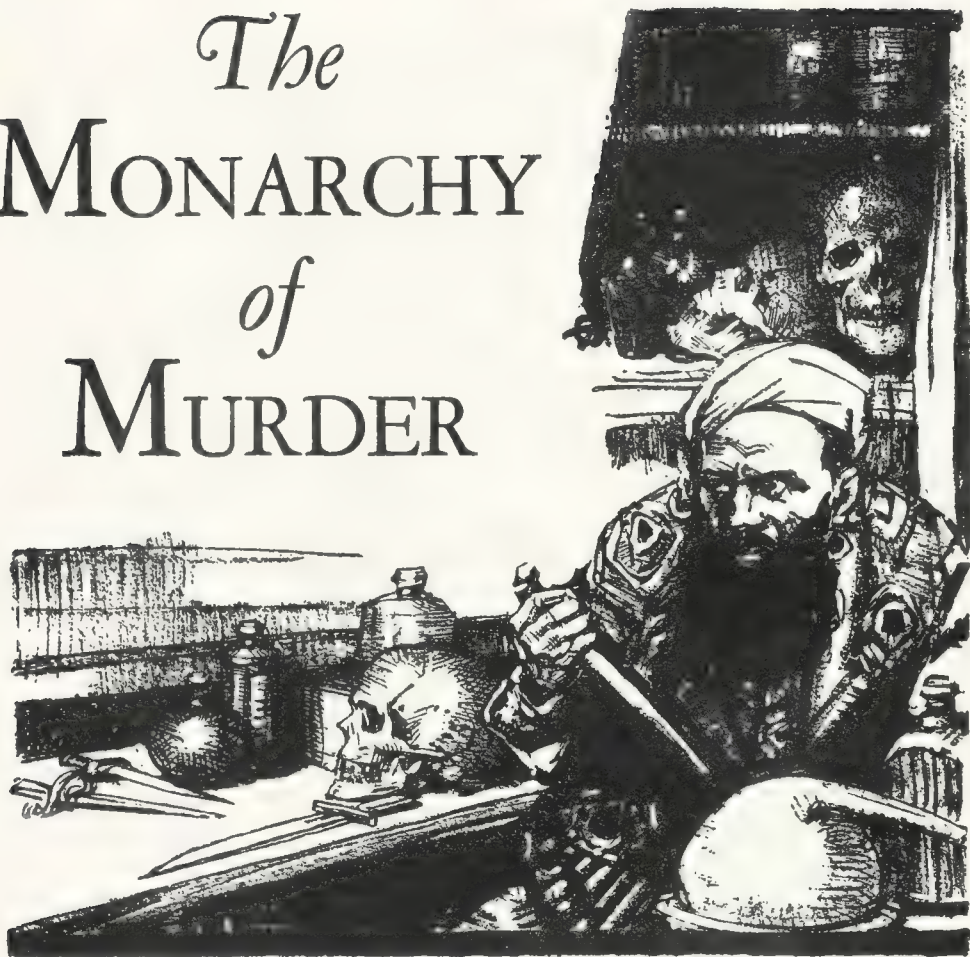
O Lord of Storms—whenever it may be
My time to go—uproot me like a tree!

I dread the sapless pause, the sick delay,
The agony of waiting day by day.

Better the pine that feels a sudden puff
Of angry wind and knows it is enough.

When I grow weak, worn by the blow and shout—
Swift as a tree that falls—let me go out.

The MONARCHY of MURDER



By FAIRFAX DOWNEY

HASSAN BEN SABAH, the Old Man of the Mountains, Grand Master of the Assassins, turned from the envoy who had been arrogantly demanding his submission to the Sultan of the Seljuks. His gaze, as chill and deadly as the basilisk's, fastened on a youth of the Fidavi, or Devoted Ones, of his own bodyguard.

"Kill thyself," the Old Man of the Mountains calmly commanded.

The young man drew a dagger from his scarlet girdle. Without the slightest hesitation he plunged it into his heart and fell to the ground with his life's

blood staining his fresh white robe.

Hassan ben Sabah ignored both the corpse and the appalled envoy. The serpent eyes sought out a second of the Fidavi and the imperious voice ordered—

"Throw thyself from the ramparts."

How sheer and how lofty rose the walls of Alamut, the Vulture's Nest, from the crag on which it was built; how dizzy the distance to the rocky plain beneath—this was fresh in the mind of the newly arrived envoy. He saw the Devoted One spring to the ramparts, saw him leap off into space to be

dashed to death an instant later on the rocks below. The cold measured tones of the Grand Master cut through the horror of the shaken witness.

"In this way am I obeyed by seventy thousand faithful subjects. Be that my answer to your master."

Such was the message delivered to Malik Shah, Sultan of the Seljuks. And thus from the end of the 11th Century on through nearly two hundred years did the Order of the Assassins strike terror into the hearts of princes and potentates. The rulers of Syria, Persia, Arabia and Egypt trembled under the threat of the scepter that was a dagger. Two leaders of the Crusaders died at the behest of a Grand Master of the Order. Crowned heads even in distant Europe are said to have lain with less than the proverbial lack of ease after the mysterious receipt of warnings from the sinister Shiekh Del Monte.

None of the terrorist secret societies of history can compare in malign efficiency with the medieval Assassins. They stalked a victim for years, if need be, till he fell under their daggers. For two centuries their ranks were full of blindly obedient master-stabbers who sacrificed themselves to perform "deeds worthy of hell in the hope of heaven."

Palaces, cities and camps were honeycombed with their spy system of lay members. The wily brains of initiates, utterly without scruples or mercy, guided the willing hands that drove home the steel. And over them all a Grand Master sat in his almost impregnable mountain stronghold and moved his pawns on a chessboard of murder.

Founder and first Grand Master of the Order, Hassan ben Sabah was one of the most extraordinary and completely evil geniuses the world ever has known. The power of life and death he wielded so spectacularly at Alamut that day to shatter the courage of the Seljuks was attained and held through a long career whose philosophy was: Believe nothing; dare all.

He was only seven, he was wont to

relate, when he determined to use his knowledge and capacities to the utmost. That resolution was no childish fancy, for his life reads like a malevolent version of a success story. His father sent him to the famous school of the Iman Mowaffaq and there he formed a friendship with two brilliant companions: Nizam al-Mulk, destined to become the mighty vizier of two Seljuk sultans; and Omar Khayyam, who was to give the world his "Rubaiyat." Hassan's nature clashed with theirs, but his keen mind attracted them. The future Assassin, always calculating, one day proposed a pledge which his friends accepted with boyish carelessness.

Just as devoted classmates sentimental on the eve of graduation always have and always will promise each other not to lose touch, the three friends made their compact. Its dire consequences recalled its words to Nizam and he set them down in his memoirs.

"It is a universal belief that the pupils of the Iman Mowaffaq will attain to power," Hassan declared, and he did not exaggerate the reputation of the school which was celebrated throughout Islam.

"Now if we do not all attain it, without doubt one of us will," he continued craftily. "What then shall be our mutual pledge and bond?"

"Be it what you please," Nizam and Omar answered.

"Well," Hassan suggested lightly, "let us make a vow that to whomsoever this power falls, he shall share it equally with the rest, and reserve no preeminence for himself."

"Be it so," the others agreed, and so they mutually pledged themselves.

Nizam and Omar had rashly mortgaged their fortunes. The subtle Hassan, reading the character of his comrades, was aware that he had not involved himself in the least. The three friends parted to seek the paths of power.

Nizam al-Mulk was a born statesman. His abilities sped his rise to the highest post of the realm, vizier to Alp Arslan, Sultan of the Seljuks. Then came Omar

Khayyam to greet the distinguished friend of his school days at his palace in Naishapur. Nizam at once offered to share his power, according to the bond. But Omar would accept no more than the pension to which his fame as a poet entitled him. It gave him leisure to enjoy—

"A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness . . ."

No more he wanted, save the stars to gaze at, for he also was an astronomer of note.



NOT so Hassan ben Sabah. He arrived to exact his bond in full. Before Nizam had a chance to offer to fulfil the contract, he darkly threatened the vizier with the punishments the Koran promises will be visited upon him who is false to his pledges. In spite of his misgivings, Nizam was true to his word. He gave Hassan joint rule with himself in the government of the empire.

From the outset Hassan used his position as the lever of a vicious intrigue to overturn his benefactor. He all but succeeded with the new Sultan Malik Shah. He failed because he had counted on Nizam to be blind in his uprightness. The wise vizier met trickery with trickery, unmasked the conspirator at the last moment and drove him from court.

Hassan's failure only spurred him on. Now he attached himself to the sect of the Ismailians, which the Persian patriot, Abdallah ibn-Maimun, had founded to free his conquered country from Islam by undermining it under cover of its own religion. The sect was widespread and strong enough to have established the Fatimite Caliphate in Egypt. Its doctrine of complete agnosticism suited the wild spirit of Hassan admirably. A supreme opportunist had found an ideal stepping stone.

By the year 1090 he had secured a base of operations, the fortress of Alamut in the mountains of Ridbar near

the Caspian Sea. He wrested it from the Seljuk governor by the ancient stratagem of the bullock hide. Having purchased such land near the castle as could be covered by the hide, he cut it into thin strips by which all of Alamut was encircled. This ruse masked the surprise attack by which Hassan's men seized the high perched "Vulture's Nest". Thence the evil menace of Hassan ben Sabah frowned down on the sultanate of the Seljuks.

Forth against this mighty kingdom Hassan sent the desperate dagger men of his secret society, killers who struck only at the rulers of the state. The Seljuk realm was shaken to its foundations by the impact of a force novel in history, "the spiritual impulses of a man directed scientifically and with consummate skill into criminal channels," as H. C. Luke so well phrases it. Hassan had developed murder as a fine art.

The wisdom of Nizam al-Mulk could not save him now. For two years the cordon of his guards held. Then an Assassin slipped through and struck. Sultan Malik Shah soon followed his great vizier, dying of a mysterious illness. Nor was Hassan's grim vengeance done until his Fidavi had stabbed to death both of Nizam's sons.

The reign of terror of the Assassins held wide dominion. Asia was stricken with horror. Princes lived in panic, even in their palaces.

The monarchy of murder established by Hassan was a remarkable organization. Under him as Grand Master, three Grand Priors ruled over three provinces. Next ranked the initiates and those in the process of initiation. Then the Devoted Ones who obeyed so implicitly the bloodthirsty commands laid upon them. Then were classed the novices and the lay members, considerable in numbers and the more formidable for the veil of secrecy which shrouded all the order.

Missionaries spread far and wide. They entrapped their recruits with religious arguments, dear to the Moslem

heart. They held out the age-old lure of the secret society. They pledged their prey to secrecy and collected dues. Their most prized proselytes were moody mystics and desperate adventurers scoured from many countries. For these strong and reckless men were the metal out of which the Grand Master by the alchemy of religious exaltation and Oriental fatalism would forge his perfectly disciplined dagger wielders.

These were the Devoted Ones who, at the word of the Old Man of the Mountains, would kill themselves or freely give their lives in an attempt to murder any one whose slaughter he decreed. No odds were too high for them, no hope too forlorn. The will of the Grand Master was to them almighty. Hundreds of them obeyed his call to certain death. Has any other mortal ever boasted such absolute and infernal power over so many of his fellow men?

This was the strange secret of the iron dominion exercised by Hassan ben Sabah and his successors over their dupes.

A novice selected to become a Devoted One was brought to Alamut. His was the high honor of banqueting with the Grand Master. In that austere and august presence it was easy to persuade the neophyte, already wrought up, that he faced a being more god than man. With mesmeric gaze and cunning words Hassan assaulted the mind of his guest. Here in majesty seemed to sit a deputy of Allah, a keeper of the keys of paradise, a rewarder of the Faithful. Graciously he pledged the novice in a cup.



THE youth drank and slipped into deep unconsciousness. The draft had been drugged with the narcotic, hashish, from which Europeans came to derive the name, Assassins, for the order. Deep in glowing dreams, the novice was carried to the hidden paradise.

In a close guarded, secluded valley near Alamut Hassan had made his fool's heaven. Thither was conveyed the

sleeping novice. He awoke alone in a garden of exquisite beauty. Drug born visions for once ended in more roseate reality. Marco Polo, who traveled in Persia only fifteen years after the fall of the last Grand Master, garnered the tale of the wonders on which the eyes of a chosen novice opened.

Fragrant flowers and leafy vineyards bloomed about him. Birds sang sweetly in the branches of the shade trees, blending their tones with the murmuring of brooks and the harmonies of hidden harps. Miniature palaces, porcelain kiosks and charming rose bowers invited the stranger. Before them he saw miraculous fountains which ran with wine and milk and honey. Goblets of gold, silver and crystal were ready to his hand. Through the portals of the pleasure domes he glimpsed soft and silken divans.

Before the novice could recover from his amazement, a throng of lovely girls approached him, "elegant and beautiful damsels, accomplished in the arts of singing, playing upon all sorts of musical instruments, dancing, and especially those of dalliance and amorous allurements." Under the caresses of these black eyed houris the enraptured youth never doubted that he had passed into the paradise which the Prophet Mohammed promised the true believer for all eternity.

For four or five days the chosen youth was permitted to dwell in these surroundings ravishing all his senses. Concealed wardens of the paradise watched and took every care that the precious illusion be preserved. For this was the dream that was the driving power behind the dagger of the Assassin.

Then a beloved maiden proffered a wine cup to the enamored novice. He drained again the hashish draft. When he woke from his stupor he was back in Alamut at the banquet board of the Grand Master. All was as he had left it. In solemn tones the Old Man of the Mountains persuaded his dupe that he had been absent only in spirit. By holy

favor he had been vouchsafed a foretaste of paradise never to be his again in life or death unless he obeyed without question or delay every command of the mighty head of the Order of the Assassins.

So the Devoted Ones dared and welcomed death in the achievement of the bloody deeds on which Hassan and his successors dispatched them. Fanatical daggers emptied the seats of the mighty. Two Caliphs, a Sultan of Khorassan, an Atabeg of Mosul, several Seljuk emirs, various princes and viziers and many other men of authority were on the long roll of their victims. Many in terror destroyed their castles and bought safety with bribes. Others employed the Assassins to murder their private enemies. The daggers were busy throughout the Near East. "To escape was beyond the power of prudence," says Von Hammer, "as they watched for years for time, place and opportunity."

One prince saved himself for a time by allowing no one wearing a robe that might conceal a weapon to approach him. An Assassin substituted himself as a groom and stark naked led the ruler's horse to him. Then he struck with a dagger drawn from beneath the steed's mane. Another potentate, who surrounded himself with a heavy cordon of guards night and day, awoke one morning to find a poignard pinning a letter from the Grand Master to the ground near his head. "Had we not been well disposed toward the Sultan," the message read, "we might have plunged this dagger into his heart, instead of the ground."

The Assassins sometimes found terrorization of their foes by such methods more effective than murder. They employed it on another occasion against an influential *iman* who cursed them in every public prayer he made. One night an Assassin penetrated to his chamber, held a dagger at his throat and warned him. When it was thereafter noticed that the *iman* omitted the curse and he was asked the reason, he replied that he

had found the arguments of the Assassins too convincing and too pointed.

Very frequently the Devoted Ones were cut down or captured in their murderous assaults. Death they accepted gladly. Torture they endured to the end without speaking, a vision of the paradise to come sustaining them through all. Their families, if members of the sect, shared their fanaticism. One mother rejoiced at the news that her Assassin son had perished with his comrades in a successful stabbing mission. When she found that he alone had escaped, she cut off her hair, blackened her face and mourned.

The field armies which the Assassins mustered were more often defeated than victorious. It was chiefly the daggers that gave them dread dominance from Khorassan to the mountains of Syria, from the Musdoramus to Lebanon and from the Caspian to the Mediterranean.

Hassan ben Sabah, whose malignantly brilliant brain began it all, was more than 90 years old when he died in 1124, probably from natural causes. His last act was to slay his two sons and clear the way for a more able successor of his choice. It was known that he left in his library in Alamut several profound works he had written on the domination of the human mind and scientific corruption of the conscience. The reflections of such a master of those arts must have been a contribution of considerable weight to psychology. But they were not to survive the order, secrets perhaps better lost.



FIVE Grand Masters of the Assassins followed after Hassan, none of them matching his infernal genius. Yet their daggers traced more bloody chapters in history until the Mongol General Hulaku, sweeping west in the days of the reign of the sons of Genghis Khan, besieged Alamut in 1256. His hordes assaulted, supported by one thousand families of Chinese firework makers who manned the siege machines and the

flame throwers of Greek fire. The Vulture's Nest on its perpendicular rocks, its deep cellars stored with corn and wine and honey, might have held out long under a strong man. Rokneddin, the last Grand Master, cravenly surrendered. Mangu Khan doomed him to death and ruthlessly exterminated the Assassins by the thousand. The library of Hassan ben Sabah was burned.

But the fortress of Masyad in the Syrian mountains had escaped the Mongol scourge, and there ruled another chief of the Assassins worthy of their tradition. Rashid al-Din Sinan had risen through the ranks of the initiates and achieved virtual independence for his branch of the Order. He was the Old Man of the Mountains whose mysterious menace caused qualms among the most stout hearted Crusaders. Their tales of his prowess and his dagger men sent shudders through the whole of Europe.

Sinan declared himself divine and took great pains to maintain his pretense. No one ever saw him eat, drink, sleep or spit. Even a limp, the result of an earthquake injury, failed to upset his claim that he was more than mortal man. When his lameness was noticed and there was grave danger of a revolt of his followers, he brought them to heel by a speech of supreme guile.

Near Masyad he established a vale of paradise similar to that of Alamut. And he added a delusion which had not been practised before. He would summon his dupes to a chamber where the bloody head of a man lay on a plate. Lo! the head would speak and deny all desire for life, having seen pavilions of paradise with the beautiful houris. When the astounded auditors had departed, the plate, a disk fitting around his neck, would be removed and the "dead" man would come out of the trap door which had hidden his body. Thereupon Sinan would signal an executioner and the man was beheaded in fact, ending telling of tales and providing a convincing exhibit which need no longer talk.

Like Hassan, Sinan used his power of life and death over his Devoted Ones for a frightful display well calculated to brand itself on the memory of the observer. Henry II, Count of Champagne, when in Syria on the Third Crusade accepted Sinan's invitation to visit him in his mountain stronghold. Escorting his guest to a lofty turret, Sinan signed to two nearby Assassins. Immediately they hurled themselves to the rocks far below. From each of the several other turrets of the castle, other pairs of Assassins watched their chief.

Sinan turned courteously to his distinguished guest.

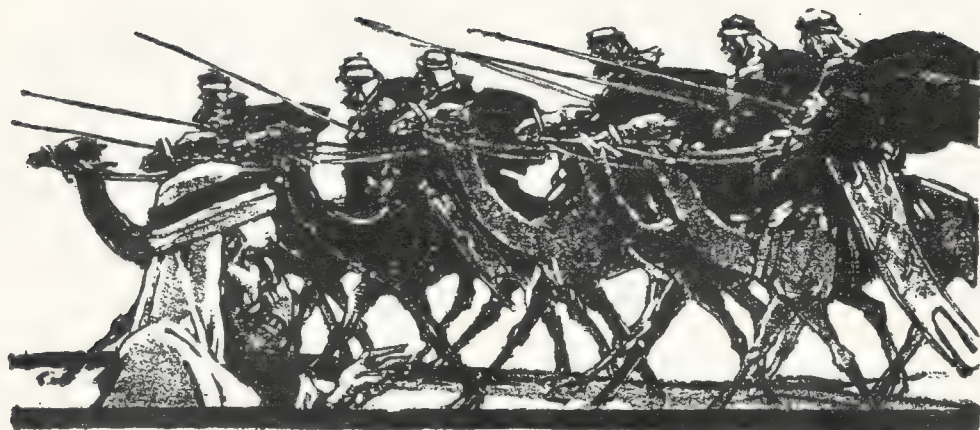
"If you desire it," he offered, "all my Devoted Ones shall throw themselves from the battlements in the same way." Henry hastily disclaimed any such wish.

Dread of the Assassins spread among the Crusaders when white robed murderers stabbed to death Raymond, Count of Tripoli, as he knelt at prayer in a church. Two more disguised as monks slew Conrad, Marquis of Montferrat, in the marketplace at Tyre. Some historians accuse Richard Cœur de Lion of instigating this deed, while others vehemently deny it.

Twice Sinan flung his dagger men upon the mighty Saladin. They wounded but did not kill the Sultan, who forthwith besieged Sinan in Masyad. The Grand Master only saved himself through an uncle of the Saracen monarch who conveyed a pledge that the Assassins never would seek Saladin's life again.

For fourteen years after the downfall of the Persian Assassins, Sinan and his Syrian branch survived. They met their nemesis in the fearless Mameluke Sultan Baibars, who marched from Egypt and turned aside to crush them during a campaign against the Franks.

Some remnants of the sect are said to exist in the mountains of Syria today. But these are only the weak and harmless heirs of a name perpetuated in the ominous word "assassin", stamped into many languages.



Beginning a Two-Part Story of the Sahara Desert

CHAPTER I

THE CALL TO ARMS

MARCAY, lieutenant of Meharistes, read the yellow radiogram handed to him by the wireless operator.

URGENT PRIORITY—T O 1451 SC—
NINETY RIFLES OULD ABIDINE SIG-
NALED LEAVING DRAA TWENTIETH
SEPTEMBER DIRECTION IGUIDI WELLS
STOP REPORT IMMEDIATELY AVAIL-
ABLE MOBILE FORCES

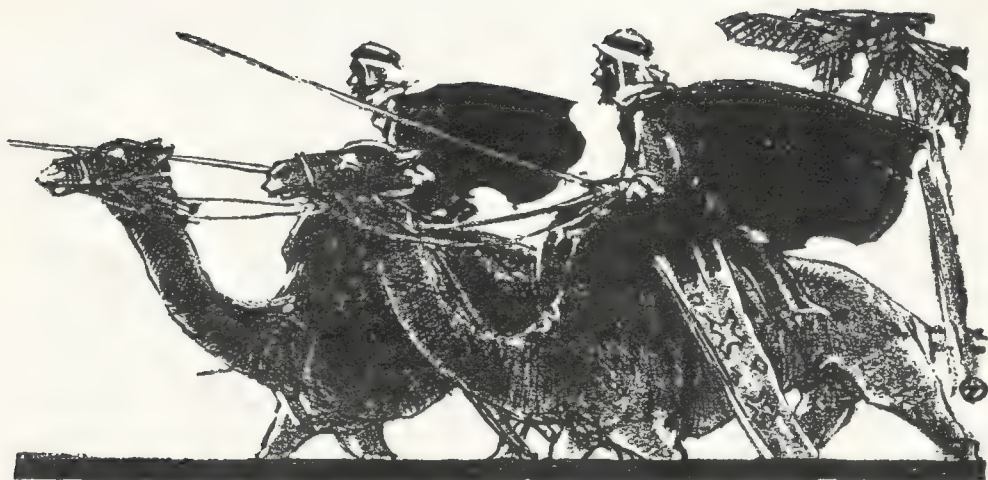
"Ninety rifles leaving the Draa"—the news came unexpectedly. For a month rumors had been circulated in the oases, created, then, belied by invisible messages. But this time the alarm descended from the sky by the twin masts of the wireless station. Ninety rifles commanded by a son of Abidine! The menacing "rezzou", the caravan of land pirates, had been launched on the southern route.

Lieutenant Marcay rose, crossed the

room to face the map of the Sahara which supplied the sole ornament of the whitewashed room—a map sprinkled with scrawled triangles and blue and red circles.

Ninety rifles had left the Draa, the turbulent zone outlined on that map by green shading and the string of tiny crosses marking the Algero-Moroccan frontier. This was the strongest expedition organized by the Berabers in three years. Lieutenant Marcay would have liked to reply at once that the Post of Adghar which he commanded was ready to throw a counter-rezzou of Meharistes, Camel Corps soldiers, across the path of the raiders.

But he had to wait until the Legionnaire, who crouched over his apparatus, headphones snug over his shaven skull, nude torso oiled with perspiration, had finished receiving. At last the operator removed the headphones. In the next room an electric bell released the panting of the motor, and the blue spark of the two o'clock signal ripped through the oppressive gloom.



The WHITE SQUADRON

By JOSEPH PEYRÉ

Lieutenant Marcay then handed to the Legionnaire the note he had scribbled, and the ether carried to the northern stations the reply of the isolated outpost—

TWO PLATOONS OF FORTY MEN WILL
BE ABLE TO LEAVE IN FORTY-EIGHT
HOURS

Men mattered little. The question of leadership concerned the mounts. How many mehara—saddle camels—could Lieutenant Marcay bring together for service? Forty animals had just returned from a scouting trip, fagged out. There were fifty others at the pasturing grounds of the company, three hundred kilometers away. Since the first alarming rumors, the post commander had made his plans, and eighty camels could be brought from the Ilatou pasture where they had been held in reserve.

The sparks were crackling still in the semi-obscurity of the room in which the light was diffused and blued by the window curtains, when the officer emerged

into the glare of the hot African sun.

Marcay was dressed in the Saharan style, wore the short blouse, the ample, ankle length trousers of white cotton. *Nayels*—wide soles of antelope's hide—protected his bare feet from the burning contact of the sand.

Despite the lateness of the season the heat still attained one hundred and ten degrees in the shade. The whirls of air were like the breath of an oven. The dazzling reflection of the sun was broken only by patches of red shadow thrown by the buildings huddling their regular cubes against the enclosing wall.

The wireless masts, jutting above the squat structures, still appeared to vibrate with the news: Ninety rifles out of the Draa; desert wells and caravans menaced, the Hod and Azawad regions exposed to attack, a sweep of one thousand kilometers, west and south!

Marcay passed under the arch of the drawbridge fording the dry moat, answered the salute of the sentry. Then he crossed the wide, nude stretch separating the fort from his home in the native

village. Nothing lessened the implacable heat; the sun weighed on his neck like a fiery weight, and the sandals clung to the hot sand.

The men of the Saharan Company slept, scattered for the siesta, in the Arab dwellings. How would they raise from this arena, from these walls still as death, the eighty armed riders, the Meharistes who were to form the White Squadron?

Marcay pushed the door of planks, assembled from broken cases, on which the label, Imperial Kébir, appeared in poster sized letters, and entered his home. He awakened the orderly who slept on the cool stones, the *chesh*, veil of the desert Arab, drawn to shield his eyes.

The soldier rose. He was, like all the Meharistes, a man of the Chaamba tribe; slim and wiry, yellow of skin, wearing the short, curly fringe of beard of his people. He had been nicknamed Lazraf, because of his blue eyes, which were so light that the sun seemed to have burned them out.

"Find Lieutenant Kermeur. Tell him to come to see me at once," the officer ordered.

Lazraf walked away.

Marcay entered another room. A small negro boy pulled the punkah with much noise of poles, of squeaking pulleys and steel wires. The white hanging with the red stripes was drawn aside by a slim, brown hand, and the anxious face of Rahma, his native companion, appeared. Marcay halted her with a gesture.

"Lieutenant Kermeur is coming."

The hand dropped the curtain, and the lieutenant stretched on the carpet of thick wool, which yielded underfoot like coarse grass—a large Gerryville carpet, red and black, a souvenir of his friend Bettini, fallen at the combat of Timissao. Bettini was dead—and Kermeur, a stranger, would travel at his side during the coming raid.

Like the wings of a blind bat, the punkah beat from wall to wall, and drove the cigaret smoke against the

white drapes on the partitions. Marcay remained prone a short time, thinking of the rezzou, which had been five days on the march already. He rose, threw away the cigaret, paced restlessly.

The ceiling of the room seemed too low for his stature, famed throughout the Desert, and the wide opening of the blouse bared his square shoulders, his hard muscles. His head was shaved closely, and sweat curled around the thick eyebrows protecting his gray eyes, dripping down his temples, upon his hard cheeks, deeply graven by years of campaigning.



WITHIN a few minutes the hangings parted to reveal Lieutenant Kermeur, dressed in native garments like his chief. The Mehariste officers of the South do not wear the scarlet vest studded with tiny gold buttons. Their garb is simple. Yet the unexpected awakening had not prevented the new arrival from smoothing his hair and cleaning his hands. He was a handsome chap, smaller than Marcay, very dark, neat and shaved as if going to dine at his club. He had been with the company only a month.

"Forgive me for interrupting your nap," Marcay said. "I hesitated, but I had to tell you—as you are coming with me."

Kermeur did not appear to notice the cool tone. He accepted the radiogram offered him by Marcay, read it without visible emotion.

"You are astonishing!" Marcay remarked. "You read that like a fourth page item. Ninety rifles, a rezzou such as the Berabers have not sent out for years, the hard job for which we waited, gnawing our nails with impatience. And that doesn't seem to affect you."

He hesitated, then the silence of his subordinate compelled him to resume.

"Evidently you can not understand. Despite all the yarns that may have been told you between two games of bridge, you can not know the mad luck

brought you by that paper. Mad, mad, mad luck! At most, you've been here a month, and we are called out. When I think that on my arrival here from Syria I had to break in with six months of pasture duty. Six months of turning with the sun around the bushes. Ninety rifles out of the Draa! Just think that at Timissao we were seeking but sixty."

"With Lieutenant Bettini?"

"With Lieutenant Bettini."

A long silence followed the name of the dead chief. Kermeur took a cigaret from the gold case which he had not replaced yet with one of native leather.

"I should have liked to know him," he said simply.

The conversation lagged again. Now that he had given him the news, Marcay appeared embarrassed by the presence of his lieutenant. There was nothing to link them; they had no regrets, no hopes, to share. He concluded as he showed him out:

"Nothing to do but wait. Will we get the order to start? I hope so. But it would not be the first time we were placed on the alert without cause."

Left alone, Marcay stretched his sinewy arms, breathed deeply. Then he sought in a corner his *rahla*—his saddle. He was as proud of it as of a weapon, for it had been worn by his Syrian camel at the combat of De-Rhezza; a magnificent saddle of red leather, signed and dated in black by its maker, a saddle admired by the men of the company because, being fastened together with spines, it contained not the smallest bit of metal.

The officer held it suspended in his hands and, by the flexible cross-pommel and the back, tested its balance. Suddenly the punkah stopped moving, and there was the soft impact of bare feet, running rapidly. Marcay smiled at this known sound, which heralded the visit of Adjutant Devars, an old Saharan settled at Adghar after reaching pension age. The negro boy was afraid of the ex-soldier's loud voice.

Devars, who seemed to crowd the doorway with his bulk, halted short on

the threshold and smiled knowingly.

"The saddle?"

"Yes, old man."

Further questions were useless. Nevertheless, Devars resumed, as if to make sure he was not dreaming—

"The rezzou?"

"Left on the twentieth. Read—sit down."

"Ten years less—ten years less and the right to go!" cried the old Saharan, whose worn face expressed a warlike joy.

"I'll take you along."

"You say that. But you won't miss me—you'll miss Bettini. You'd wish to do Timissao over again."

Marcay changed the subject.

"I'll call Rahma. I sent her away because I had to talk with Kermeur. He cleaned his nails before coming."

"What a reception you must have granted him. He won't forget it. Maybe you don't realize it, but you're unjust with him."

"Unjust? I'd like to see you in my place, forced to take along a Spahi, a cavalryman, who lacks even pasture training, who comes fresh from social teas. I'm telling you we'll have to get him a manicure."

Marcay left the room to call Rahma.

The moving of the saddle seemed to have quickened the smell of native leather and of wool which reeked through the vapor of the incense.



LEFT alone, Adjutant Devars stared unseeingly at the basketwork overlapped with red, green and orange, at the Tuareg leathers, at the Moroccan daggers, the Fez clay pots with their washed-out hues. He had come here for months, at this same hour, from the house he had built for himself in the native village when he had retired. Like many other Saharans, he had desired to remain in the shadow of the fort in which he had served.

Rahma brought the mint tea a few moments later. She passed the cups to the two Frenchmen, called in a low voice

to the elderly negress in the next room—"Water."

Then she refilled the kettle with the ritual gestures.

"I hope they're not hooked by the Saoura Company," Marcai said.

"Let's hope that some platoon is not wandering that far," the noncommissioned officer replied like an echo.

They shared the same fear; if the rezzou did not shift its path far enough westward, it chanced meeting a wandering platoon of the Saoura Saharan Company, and it then would become useless to await it or seek it farther south. The joy of the chase, the thrill of combat, would go to others. Tacitly the two men dismissed this unpleasing thought and talked over the probabilities of the coming campaign. For them the armed band which was coming down from the Moroccan border had a familiar shape, showed known faces. Both knew, to a man, all the chieftains.

"I'll settle accounts with Si Mahmoud," Marcai said, with a ring of rancor in his tone.

"He surely passed you by in review?"

That expression pleased Devars because of its irony. Si Mahmoud, a rebel chieftain, had been in ambush, somewhere in the Western Sahara, and had allowed Marcai's detachment to file before him, as if on parade, deeming the officer's forces too strong to cope with. Then he had attacked a hunting detail—which was following some hours behind the platoons. Four Meharistes composing that group had been killed, among them Marcai's best liaison man. Among desert leaders, Meharistes or raiders, such scores must be settled. Kermeur knew nothing of this hunter's warfare.

"You say that I am unjust," Marcai resumed, for he had felt the older man's reproach, "but how do you want me to talk with him, as I talk with you, for instance? He doesn't even know what a rezzou is. I'd have to explain to him, as to a tourist: A rezzou is a piratical undertaking, backed by Tafilet notables, an expedition which leaves the Moroc-

can border and attempts to cross the Sahara from north to south to pillage in the Sudan."

"You're kidding me."

"I swear he knows nothing."

They were interrupted by a messenger from the Hotel of the Transatlantic Company. This hotel had been opened recently; regular automobile tours were to link Adghar with Colomb-Bechar all Winter. This first sign of approaching civilization irked Marcai.

"An invitation from the management for this evening," he explained, tearing up the blue paper.

"You won't go?"

"I wouldn't set foot inside the dump."

"Maybe the best course. You've already smashed at least half their glassware."

"That shack should be demolished," Marcai stated. "The automobiles, the tourists with their cartridge belts, the hotel—and empty tin cans everywhere. You're one who can understand me, old man. We'll have to leave, to go and pitch our tent farther. Meanwhile, there's the hard job. The Berabers are out. Twenty days of travel, and they'll be at the wells. And we're here talking! I count on you, old man. Two platoons to fit out, and it's not Kermeur who'll help me."



ADJUTANT DEVARS had left; night had fallen. Moths fluttered about the acetylene lamp spilling a cone of light on the tawny maps of the Sahara, which still bore the pencil markings of the long raid to Timissao—fifteen hundred kilometers of sand, stone and sun, which had spared thirty-seven men and which ended at the grave of the Corsican lieutenant, Bettini.

Music came across the silence from the hotel. Kermeur was dining there tonight. Marcai could hear so clearly that he imagined the dark disk spinning on the phonograph.

"If the order is delayed," he thought, "we shall not reach the wells in time."

At last the Legionnaire brought in the expected message.

T C 1457 SC ORDER TO LIEUTENANT MARCAY TO TAKE COMMAND AVAILABLE FORCES AND LEAVE IMMEDIATELY TO WATCH WELLS EL KSEIB REGION STOP AUTHORIZED RECRUIT GOMU FIFTY MEN TO ASSURE GUARD OF OASIS

The gomu is a sort of posse formed with armed partisans of friendly tribes. The order had come!

"Lazraf!" Marcay addressed his orderly. "A runner for Ilatou."

Lieutenant Marcay could not await indoors the arrival of the runner he had sent for. He walked as far as the drawbridge. Against the night, electric lamps outlined the crenelated walls of the hotel. But the officer's mind was elsewhere, at the pasturing zone of Ilatou, where, guarded by a mounted section, eighty camels were in reserve.

The runner arrived, took the envelop. He shook his chief's hand, leaped into the saddle and was off at a gallop.

The fort was scarcely awake before Lazraf brought to the door of Lieutenant Marcay's house his two riding camels, Targui and Hagel. Targui and Hagel were never sent to pasture. Their master had them kept and fed at the post, a luxury in which he took much pride.

The two animals sank to the sand, knees bent, muzzle to muzzle, and chewed on an armful of green forage. Marcay appeared soon, and went first to Targui, the swift white camel which Lieutenant Bettini had mounted during the long raid. Before dying at Timissao Well, Bettini had entrusted Targui to Marcay, who had used him as his war mount ever since, in remembrance of a lost comrade. Gently, with visible tenderness, Marcay touched the hard, dark scar which the beast showed on the right shoulder since the combat in which the Corsican officer had been slain—the scar of a Winchester bullet.

The white camel rose at his master's

order. Born in the Ahaggar, he had the gentleness of the Tuareg's mounts, which distinguishes them from those of the Chaamba, too roughly broken in not to complain at the slightest touch. Hagel imitated him, though slower and heavier, and propped himself on three legs, for the right hind leg was bent, bound at the knee with a rope. Hagel's bones were larger, stronger than Targui's; his endurance allowed him to keep up, for long stretches, a tireless, jerky trot.

Targui might be compared to a thoroughbred, Hagel to a hunter. Pressed between their flanks while he examined their limbs and hoofs, Marcay felt that he really formed one with them—speed and strength, resistance to fatigue and to death—and that their blood coursed through his own veins.

"With such beasts you can carry on as far as the Niger River!" cried Adjutant Devars, who arrived at the appointed time.

As if he were leaving himself, he was to spend hours attending to the mounts, to the least detail of their burdens. The day would not be long enough. In his turn he examined the elastic hocks of Targui. He hesitated an instant, worried by a jutting tendon which no other fingers than his would have found.

"Anything wrong? The leg has chafed?" Marcay asked him.

The old Saharan waited a few seconds before answering. Then, brushing the hair on the hock with a reassuring pat, he said:

"No. It's all right. Did Kermeur have his camels brought up?"

"Kermeur?" Marcay shrugged. "His orderly is handling his camels. And if he's not at hand when we start—"

"Nobody'll look for him."

"Nobody."



RAHMA appeared under the earthen arches, spoke to her master.

"Do I put in the boxes?"

Since dawn she had been preparing the *quesh*—the load of the camels. With

great care, which gave her an excuse when Marçay passed by, to lower her head and conceal her tears, she had counted over and over again the small leathern bags, the canvas sacks which contained rice, tea, sugar, ground wheat, the reserve rations which she kept in readiness constantly. But the boxes, should she put in the boxes? The boxes were the canned meats. The Mehariste takes them only to the pasture zone, and they have no place in the packs during a counter-rezzou, for they make additional, needless weight.

"No. Not the boxes," Marçay replied, without looking at her.

Rahma bent lower over her work. There was no sound save the tinkling of her bracelets and her earrings. She slowly unrolled the *guerbas*—the containers made of goat skins—the first of which, already distended with water, hung from a wooden frame, dripping upon the hard packed sand where the falling drops dug tiny holes. Marçay strode away, for the sight of a woman's sorrow was unbearable to him.

He spent a long time over his saddlebags, brought him by a native cobbler. Then he spoke to his orderly, who inspected to the last stitch the seams of the *guerbas*, more precious than the bags of food.

"Lazraf, be careful that they don't let go on us— Remember?"

The native nodded; six months earlier, after a pursuit of twenty days, the *guerbas* had lost their water and a platoon of the company had been compelled to turn about and to allow a rezzou, so weighed down with loot that it lost twenty kilometers a day, to escape.

"This time the *guerbas* shall not be at fault," Lazraf assured.

When he had finished his own preparations Lieutenant Marçay went to the military stores, which had opened their heavy doors early that morning. The men filed out one by one, hung with cans of oil, their legs bent under sacks of tea, rice and ground wheat. Some of the wealthier privates had brought with

them a donkey or a negro boy.

The native sergeant, Belkheir, a Chambi of small stature, dry as a reed, with slanting eyes, was counting out cartridges. He was feared for his quiet authority. Marçay exchanged a few words with him before resuming his inspection. The officer had replaced the azure banded képi with a *chesh*, the native veil which swathes head and neck. There remained nothing to distinguish him from his men.

It was at eleven o'clock, when he had received by wireless further orders concerning the arming of his detachment, the number of cartridges allotted, that Marçay met Fennec, Kermeur's orderly. He learned that, surprised by the rapid mobilization, the lieutenant had not yet completed his packing.

"Time counts," Marçay grumbled. "We're six days late as it is. Six long days."

"The lieutenant wants to take books along," Fennec said, with hesitation.

"Books? He's crazy! Tell him that there'll be just enough food not to croak with hunger a thousand miles out."

Books! Marçay had not recovered from his surprise when a young Chambi, who had already seen some fighting with the militia, presented himself. He was accompanied by an older brother—a true desert runner who had taken part in a hundred rezzous, had fired a gun against all four French Saharan Companies, to serve for a period later in the Italian Camel Corps of Tripolitania. He had arrived one day with two camels, from two thousand kilometers east, to join the company. For enlistment, a worthy nomad is not required to show papers of identification.

"What do you wish?" Marçay asked the young man.

The old nomad replied for his brother: "His leg has healed. He wants to go."

These two brothers, accustomed to hunting together, would be worth ten men in a tight spot. The officer, who always sought to couple his soldiers in friendly pairs, nodded, and the two na-

tives walked away, radiant, brass tea tray clicking against the carbine butt.

Time was passing. As long as the camels had not arrived, the noisy swarm would remain here, glued to the ground, unable to leave the oasis.

CHAPTER II

THE START

THE herd of camels from the pasture at Ilatou reached Adghar shortly before noon, a tornado of flying sand. It attained the first houses of the village, choked through the narrow street, and spilled into the open place to spread under the sun in a tumult of complaints.

The lookout had signaled the approach of the camels. In an instant the men who had been waiting, reins in hand, had found and bridled their mounts. The Meharistes of the pasture guard were arm weary and dripped sweat.

Adghar had emptied. The crowd of villagers, whose odor is so greasy that it stagnates between the earthen walls like a heavy oil—women in gala dress, stiff beneath their weighty jewelry and their swathings of orange, rose and green silks, leaving behind them a trail of musk and sugary perfumery; negresses draped in blue with hair tressed on their necks and gleaming with coral and shell ornaments—flooded the marketplace at this unusual hour. Ordinarily, the blazing sun and the iron-red sand drove away all life.

The acrid stench of camels, stronger than that of new leather or burned incense, permeated the whole village. Eighty camels with full humps, rich blood and muscles thickened by three months of calm pasturing, had taken possession of Adghar. Soon they blockaded the streets, kneeling in groups of three or four around piles of forage or dried dates that their thick lips rasped in, mingled with moist sand. They were indifferent to their surroundings, without

pride, but Marcai went from one to another with an attentive glance he had not granted the men.

With the *guerbas* aligned on the sand, the red leather of Aoulef make, the Ahaggar saddlebags, and those, rounder and larger made by Azgers, with the brand new saddles and the saddles on which the cross-pommels had been taped with white cloth, the village assumed the aspect of a caravansary.

The men, burdened with piles of khaki *gandouras*, with white and black cloth, with veils checkered white and yellow, with brass kettles, ropes, knives, cans of Tuareg butter, copper plates shining like small suns, stirred up a warm odor of pepper and cinnamon, of tea and tobacco, of suet and raw leather.

These movements, as of a tribe about to break camp, the smells, the clash of arms, the rumors, the calls, the oaths, the disorder, stirred Marcai's heart. For in this disorder, which would have been the despair of a regular soldier, in this armed, barbaric horde, he had located one by one his comrades of war.

Kermeur had appeared but two or three times. What had he thought of this tumult? But, as nothing suffered from his absence, Marcai had forgotten him completely. Therefore, he was surprised, as he reentered the fort, to find the Spahi in his path. He made an effort to avoid the silence which always threatened to settle down between them when they met, to explain the confused spectacle offered since morning on the marketplace.

"Evidently it's a singular uproar," he admitted. "But we're irregulars. However, tomorrow morning two platoons will line up on that marketplace—ready."

Kermeur accompanied his chief to his door, seemed reluctant to leave him. Then a visible awkwardness gripped him. As they parted Marcai asked—

"Going back to the hotel?"

"No. I have nothing left to do there."

"Not even to bid farewell to the world?"

Marcay smiled skeptically as he spoke.

He knew the Spahi's tastes well. He beat the red and green fringes of his riding crop against the ample folds of his trousers, hesitated, then pushed the door of his dwelling. Inside, he found Rahma weeping, forehead touching her knees; she had been his woman for three years.

He retired to his quarters and did not emerge until night. He had granted permission to the villagers to keep their lamps alight. Contrasted with the illumination of the hotel, these humble lights twinkled, as if shaken by the monotonous music of the *teubeul*, the hammering of Sudanese calabashes dulled by the earthen walls. The dogs of the village were howling as the tomtoms beat. The dogs within the fort answered them. In the darkness of the vast marketplace, from which a squadron must spring with the first light of dawn, the camels slept, long necks outstretched, their serpents' heads resting on the sand.



IT WAS three o'clock in the afternoon. The ardent sun in the center of the marketplace isolated eighty men without shadows—white platoons arrayed midway between the military post and the village, merged with the flooding light, with nothing to link them with life. Carbine slung across the back, rein held beneath one foot, the riders squatted before the files of standing camels. White Squadron already cast off like a vessel, from which no voice could reach the earth. At long intervals the plaintive cry of an animal rose in the silence of the sun to awaken a brief echo when it struck the walls.

At last a whistle broke the mute ranks, the concert of the camels roared out as they knelt upon a brutal jerk on the reins. From the terraces the riders with the red bandoleers crossing their chests were seen straddling the saddles, rising in a single surge two meters above the soil, in a cloud of yellow sand.

As soon as the mounts had reformed

in perfect alignment, silence came again. Lined before the drawbridge, a detachment afoot presented arms. At this time a silhouette, which until then had merged with the mass of the squadron, detached itself; returned at a limping walk. This was Adjutant Devars.

On his white camel, Lieutenant Marcay took the head of the column, lifted his arm for a second, then lowered it toward the west. The camels stretched their necks forward, started.

Standing alone, braced on his cane, one hand shading his eyes against the glare, Adjutant Devars watched the squadron until it was devoured by the sun.

In the column a few men half turned in the saddles, waving their right hands slowly, and veils fluttered a farewell from the terraces.

The Meharistes had not passed the last crenelated wall when the mirage appeared, the mirage which would precede them for weeks, spreading before their eyes an unreal horizon in which would drown the rolling of the sand and the sharp crest of the stony hills. The west started to dance in the sunlight. A dazzling vibration detached from the arid plain a floating shore, etched against the sky like elongated cirrus clouds rising from scintillating lakes.

As it was already thirty minutes past three o'clock, the first day's trip must be short. Marcay had wished to start that afternoon, to "break loose", to leave as swiftly as possible to establish a camp outside of Adghar, to force his Chaamba back into nomad life.

He rode ahead of the platoons, Lazraf at his side. Kermeur remained behind. At the end of an hour's march the officer of Spahis began to suffer from isolation, although he had spent two days preparing himself for the test. At Adghar, he had accepted the coldness and aloofness of Marcay. But here, where men marched in tribal groups or in couples striding at the same pace, he felt himself oscillating in emptiness. The few words of Arabic he could exchange

with his riders remained powerless against the silence. He fell back upon Fennec, his orderly, who spoke French.

But El Fennec, the "sand fox", deserved his nickname. The open dislike shown by Marcai toward Kermeur had placed him on guard. Kermeur made vain efforts to talk to him. Fennec replied with evasive words, his eyes on the tall silhouette of Marcai.

"With Lieutenant Marcai, Lieutenant Bettini was the greatest chief in the South," he said at last. "Targui and Hagel always strode side by side."

After a time which seemed very long to him, Kermeur turned and found himself at the tail of the column. There was not a man behind him. But where was his place, that "second platoon", of which he had received command? How could he know his own men among these white phantoms lacking faces?

Along the irregular front of the detachment, sweeping forward urged by an unknown discipline of war across the plain, the camels went their gait, turning their heads at each pace, swinging long necks to the rhythm of their strides. The patience of an infinite raid, proof against thirst, hunger and suffering, lulled their nerveless progress, their soft shuffling.

Near evening their loose, thick lips, which beat against their yellow teeth as they walked, lifted to drive away large blue flies, which announced the proximity of the last palm grove. Soon the files parted, divided by the numerous well-curbs rimming the holes that pierced the soil to the underground galleries.

The column then crossed the zone of dying palm trees, which each year buries deeper in the dunes. Red ramparts appeared, abandoned since the neighborhood of Adghar made the oasis secure against the constant pillaging raids of the past.

"The rezzous formerly came this far," Marcai remarked to Kermeur, when their mounts walked side by side. "To-day, we must seek them at the bottom of hell."

Clinging to the trunks of the palm trees, the negroes who were gathering the dates beheld the imposing parade formed by the detachment, which halted, having found water and wood, and made camp. A few moments elapsed before the elderly kaid, chieftain of the village, wearing his red burnous, fist closed on the handle of a silver banded stick, came with the notables to greet Marcai. The ceremonial tea followed.

"What news?" Marcai asked, after the customary greetings.

"Good, Allah be praised," the kaid answered. "There are dates aplenty."

"And within thy realm? Thou didst not signal anything for a week."

The kaid appeared to make an effort a suspicious acquaintance with the hostile tribes of Tafilet, tribes which, before to recall. Certain of his friends kept up the coming of the French, had been masters of this oasis for centuries. Between official allegiance and friends, the old chief hesitated. But one of the notables with him, who had sought for a long time to gain the favor of the French authorities at Adghar, spoke.


"A marabout passed by."

"Ah, yes, yesterday," the kaid hastened to explain. "On a collection tour."

"He had no news?" Marcai insisted.

"No."

Marcai was about to consult Kermeur with a glance when he recalled that the Spahi did not know the kaid, could not understand the meaning of his reticence. He was content to dismiss the old Arab, whose actions he had watched for a long time. Then he left Kermeur alone to watch over the encampment, which would not be the better for his care. Why had this officer been sent to Adghar, when he was fitted only for dancing and horse shows?

 THE squadron started early in the morning and, after crossing the zone of dying palms once more, forded the last row of wells. The two men in the rear glanced at the tomb of a holy man,

conspicuous against the ruined ramparts.

"May Abd - el - Kader - Djillali watch over us," one said.

Lieutenant Kermeur overheard this prayer and understood the gravity of this farewell; the last tie was broken, the squadron was about to lose itself in space.

At the head of the column Marçay breathed deeply.

"The wind of the Sahara!" He spoke to Lazraf, who had recognized, as had the officer, the cruel wind, and shared his excitement as they drew near to the desert.

Straight in the saddle, shoulders thrown back, Lazraf inhaled strongly, and with him breathed the eighty Chamba freed from the stifling palm groves. From now on the dry wind would chap their cracking lips, tan their yellow faces like leather, give their tough palms the rasping feel of ropes. Not a drop of water remained in the steely sky. The column was a lost vessel pitching under the sun, surrendered to its own strength and to fate.

The piebald, silver eyed camel mounted by Fennec, an animal which somehow completed the odd figure of his master, was striding abreast of Kermeur's mount when they reached a small dune, a heap of fine dust amassed by the wind.

"The Gourara Dune," Fennec said, motioning with his hand. He explained, "It is named thus because it serves as a tomb for four notables from the oasis in which we camped last night. They had become lost, with five negroes who accompanied them."

"Died of thirst?"

"Died of thirst—unable to come back to the oasis without a guide. They had gone too far. One of our platoons discovered the bodies. The younger had fallen far from the others. They had dragged themselves for a long time. We picked them up."

Kermeur imagined the sprawling bodies scattered in their lonely agony, shrunk by the black cooking of the sun, then buried beneath the dune that

changed places with the sweep of the wind. Town dwellers, unable to cope with space, men of an inferior breed, as he was. One after another the Meharistes passed the dune. They knew but one word and spoke but one word before this cemetery—

"*Ksouri*!"

Ksouri—villager—a term of scorn employed by the nomad to designate the town dweller who can not venture an hour away from his palm trees, from his oasis, without risking death. This funeral dune seemed to make the last palm grove as remote as if the column had been on the march a score of days.

In the silence and monotonous tossing of the march, Marçay strove to react against the sensation of isolation which was invading him, against the too poignant memory of his lost comrade. He succeeded only by thinking of the quest ahead, which must from this time onward galvanize him to action. At the gait kept up by the squadron there was hope that he might intercept the raiders north of the wells.

An hour after passing the dune Mohammed ben Ali, second sergeant, a true nomad who came to life only after a long trip in the desert, brought his camel trotting back toward the main body. Excited by the keen air, by the joy of having lost contact with the world, the men swapped dried dates and pink packages of cigarets from one camel to another. A brutal mirth elated them all. The guide, Negoussi, chest bent against the flank of his mount, drew a small native flute from a saddlebag.

After blowing through the tube to clean it of the tiny fragments of tobacco, he tooted several strident notes before swinging into the prelude of the melodious cadence that men and camels awaited eagerly. A nasal voice droned the tunes of which the flute gave the rhythm, and whole files of men, having fastened the reins to the cross-pommels of the saddles, beat time with their hands. Recognizing a familiar lilt, the camels lengthened their strides, progressed at a

faster pace.

"Seven kilometers an hour," Marcai stated.

He had not needed to consult his watch, which was enclosed in a sealed double case.

Freed from immediate concern, his thought carried him forward, toward the wells where, at any cost, he must bar the rezzou's path. Behind him the compact column formed but one body, where a new pulse throbbed in regular beat; he felt as if the whole detachment were articulated from his own shoulders, that his legs were tuned to the elastic, supple stride of his camel.

The elation increased. Negoussi stood erect in the saddle, dominating the procession, his white *gandoura* lashing in the wind like a flag. Cheikh ben Kouider, the sixteen year old soldier who was about to participate in his first combat, sang in a shrill voice. From the opposite wing of the column a bass voice answered in an improvised dialogue.

Negoussi's flute hushed before the end of the day's march, vanished in the saddlebag; it was the beginning of void and silence.

Lazraf, who sensed his master's loneliness, followed him like a shadow. At sunset the two went ahead of the detachment. Lazraf dismounted, threw a handful of sand into the air, which made a brief, yellow fuse against the greenish sky.

"The pasturing is good," Sergeant Belkheir said, dismounting in his turn.

This was the signal for the first desert camp. The camels were unloaded, the men stretched out for the night, each one near his saddle and pack.

Again Kermeur remained alone. How could he understand these men, partisans who seemed held by no discipline? How could he win their confidence? No military experience availed in the desert. As if to discourage him the more, Fennec had mentioned, this very evening, the names of two or three officers eliminated by a single raid.

Had Fennec guessed the perturbation

of his master? As soon as night had fallen, he had left Kermeur, although Lazraf remained near Marcai, prone at his feet like a hunting dog. The tall lieutenant was in the center of the encampment; he was its heart. He had no cares save those concerning the pursuit, the rezzou. Kermeur envied him this peace of mind. For him, the fear that he would not be able to stand the test gripped him, obsessed him. He had been marching but two days, yet the squadron dragged him along like a prisoner, like a corpse.

The stiffness of ten hours in the saddle now ached in his loins; the odor of the camels impregnated the night, too strong to be absorbed by the slow inhalation of the sand. Lacking the friendship of Marcai, the soil was icy, like frozen earth.

He fell asleep very late.



THE next morning the column had not yet been strung out by fatigue when there appeared, looming against the horizon, a flat knoll, tipped by dark projections.

"The Berabers' Gara, rezzou of 1925," Marcai announced, gesturing with his whip. "You'll see the graves. The Berabers were ambushed behind the rocks. They killed two of our Meharistes, who were advancing on this trail as we are doing. It was about this time of day."

Two Moslem graves, half buried at the foot of the knoll, showed their low vaults through the sand. One following the other, the men went on along the trail that their comrades had followed that morning without knowing it led them straight to death.

There was not a breath of wind; the air was calm as if waiting for the sudden outbreak of rifle fire. The black rocks of the knoll seemed to conceal lurking human forms. Kermeur caught himself pulling on the reins. But no shot came to relax his nerves.

"It was here, all right," Marcai explained, halting Targui, "that they must have heard the whine of the bullets. The

first was unable to make his camel kneel; the beast was too nervous, and I knew it. A single shot scared it. The rider was hit when still standing." Targui shuffled uneasily, and Marçay concluded, "The other was able to make his camel kneel, and fought from shelter. An excellent demonstration of prone shooting!"

No other voice could have described so well the desperate combat of this lone man, hidden behind a bullet riddled camel, against the raiders screened by boulders; this duel of one carbine against twenty repeating rifles. Marçay indicated the rocks of the knoll, outlined against the sky like the loopholes of a fortress.

"He fired all his cartridges. One wonders how he contrived to put his bullets into such targets."

The Mehariste who had fought to the death under the murderous fire from this citadel had in fact succeeded in wounding seriously one of the Berabers' best men. Kermeur did not learn until the halt, that evening, the full adventure of the wounded raider. It was the first time since the start that Marçay spoke to his second of matters outside service.

"It's one of the most astonishing yarns of the South," he said. "The Beraber had been hit in the belly. To carry him away his comrades had tied him on a captured camel. Thus they dragged him for five hundred kilometers. The unlucky fellow could not succeed in dying. But whenever there was talk of leaving him behind—you understand that the rezzou did not need that ball and chain—his brother threatened to avenge him. This brother was the only guide capable of leading the Berabers out of the labyrinth of dunes. He had but to desert during the night, and they'd all be done for.

"Happily, one of our detachments settled the question for them, lured the Berabers into an ambush as they emerged from the dunes, killed the guide. After that the Berabers lost no time stretching the wounded man they

had brought from the knoll with such effort alongside the body of his brother. They abandoned him there. He did not die, however. Those guys are tough."

"How did you learn all that?" Kermeur wondered.

"You see that man cleaning his carbine?" Marçay indicated a rider not far from them. "That one, the third?"

"The chap with the hollow cheeks?"

"Yes, Matricular Number 209. Well, he was the wounded Beraber of the rezzou. He took a long time to heal. Now he is one of us. But he doesn't like to talk of that affair. Didn't you notice this morning that he swung wide of the two graves?"

All night long, Kermeur saw in a nightmare the yellow man with the hollow cheeks, who hung, belly ripped open, on the flank of a camel, shaken through numberless miles, his head bumping against the cinch . . .

The column marched on.

Unaccustomed to the power and the dizzying sonority of light, to the metallic vibration of the sky, Kermeur at times succumbed to the glare. Was it because he did not know how to wind the veil which alone can protect neck, shoulders and head against the deadly might of the sun? Despite the too keen reaction which urged him at times to trot faster, he constantly allowed the squadron to leave him behind. Alone at the rear, an anxious sensation then coursed his loins, which resembled fear. Fear of being deserted by men who wished to lose him, who urged their camels faster to show him their backs.

Or, in the rising of the mirage, he thought he beheld against the sky the mad cavalcade of the rezzou. The rezzou! Like the necks of the animals balanced in their ceaseless effort, all thoughts tensed toward its fleeting image, hidden beyond the horizon, but which had for them all a concrete reality. The rezzou was snaking somewhere in the sands, a column of she-camels with rounded bellies, with graceful necks, mounted by Berabers or Reguibats

garbed in blue, wearing the war head-dress. But instead of being astride saddles, these riders were squatted on leather bags, legs crossed, and instead of reins they held a stick such as those used by shepherds. A stick and a Winchester! Even the chieftains were in rags, but these rags did not conceal their muscular chests.

"You know Mouilid is with them?" Sergeant Belkheir spoke to a man at his side, when the desert at last loosened his tongue.

"Mouilid? That one sees clearly, even with but one eye remaining. He is quite capable, at three hundred meters, of knocking the sights off a carbine."

"He's quite capable of that."

Belkheir knew better than any one the worth of his foe. He addressed Cheikh ben Kouider, the young Chaambi, who admired him greatly.

"Hearest thou, Cheikh ben Kouider, thou art to fight against the sons of tent chiefs. They are thine age. They too must learn to wage war."

The sergeant alluded to the young nobles of the Berabers who joined the rezzous to receive the baptism of fire, to win their knightly spurs. In the ranks of the rezzou, at this same hour, Mouilid perhaps was speaking to his men of Belkheir, of the company's Chaamba, who had knocked one of his eyes out at the combat of Achourat.

CHAPTER III

SAND AND SUN

THE days were alike.

The departures took place when it was all still dark. Like a Bickford fuse, the whistle announcing the start lighted the fires prepared the preceding night. The men packed blankets and felts, adjusted saddles, loaded the camels, which whirled in the glare of the flames, casting high, awkward shadows and uttering their peculiar cries. The Meharistes squatted near the fires and drank their tea. After that all helped

the section on day duty to load on the pack animals the cases of cartridges and the machine guns.

The march started with two hours on foot. Reins passed over their heads, Marcay, Lazraf and the others walked bent low, hands concealed beneath their burnouses, tucked in the wide sleeves of their gray, monkish robes, to protect them from the sharp morning cold. With the easy, long strides of the nomads, they trudged on to spare their mounts.

When the sun burst over the desert the Chaamba climbed into the saddles. Then the ten pack camels in the middle of the column alone broke the regularity of the files. Ungainly, coarse, hair hanging from their bellies, they progressed three abreast, chained together, jaws held snug by rough ropes glued with saliva, saliva often tinged with blood.

Seized with pity, Kermeur often was tempted to loosen those hard ropes. Among the clean limbed riding camels, these ten 'convicts staggered under the burden of the machine guns, of ammunition cases, of the tools strapped to fibrous pads flung over their humps, the load that they must bear until the return to Adghar, by day and by night, a crushing yoke. Pitiful pariahs never loved by any master, prevented by their bulky packs from huddling together and granting themselves even the illusion of support. Perhaps one of them might succeed, some day, in running away with the pack still on his back, going straight across gravel and sands, heedless of the sun, of dangerous night, of fatigue bending his hocks, on the path leading to the familiar pasture. Sometimes lone camels are seen migrating back toward the pasturing grounds, keeping on until thirst kills them.

Telli, one of the guides, marched two whole days near them as a punishment. At Adghar, he was merely a kief smoker squatted in the Moorish café. Campaigning, it took him several days to shake off the habit. On this occasion, despite the orders against kief smoking, he had used the drug during a halt. To

make an example, Marçay had punished him with two days of prison. In this immense circle crushed under the sky, more desolate than a stone wall enclosure, prison meant that the man punished followed the mounted column afoot.

The following day the detachment reached the *reg*—the stony spread which covers infinite distances. The caravan was nailed to the ground, crucified by the sun which beat down one hundred and forty degrees of merciless heat. To save time the camels remained saddled during the noon halt. The men went to seek for wood, twisted roots betrayed by a peculiar swelling of the earth, which had to be dug up, ripped from sandy creases of the stone surface.

"Lieutenant Kermeur has said nothing to you?" Marçay asked Lazraf one evening.

The officer sensed the secret deception of the Spahi. Kermeur had pictured a group of Meharistes as a squadron of light cavalry, pursuing the enemy at the gallop. Reality must seem to him slower, harder.

"Nothing," the native replied.

Lazraf included in the same scorn Kermeur and his orderly. Fennec, he thought, was a town servant, feeble in spirit. A man who thought solely of economizing in rations. On the other hand, Fennec was jealous of Lazraf, who was Marçay's friend. Kermeur suffered to have a servant, scorned by others, assigned to him because he spoke French, an achievement which was but another reason for him to be shunned by the rest. Therefore Kermeur no longer sought Fennec's company. But the other riders shunned the lieutenant.

His loneliness was unbroken. He felt it the more because he was beginning to yield to fatigue. On the contrary, Marçay was the first and last on his feet, stronger each day. For the physical resistance of his chief, Kermeur would have yielded all he believed he possessed of soul. He knew that Marçay once had said glibly of him, "Another

chap spinning off center."

Spinning off center—why did he suffer more sharply now from these disdainful words? Was it fatigue? His bare foot slipped, tense on the curve of the camel's neck, unable to time itself to the new pace of the animal, prudent, jerky over the sharp edged flints.



ONE evening the sky before them was blanketed with a dark, dense stippling.

"Locusts," Belkheir announced briefly.

A few seconds later the insects crackled like hail against the copper plates on the camels, against the dry leather, against carbines. The crossing of this cloud lasted over fifteen minutes, cut through by the oaths of the men, who mourned that this manna had not dropped earlier on the camp. The last red locusts took flight from the cruppers of the camels.

A second providential cloud dropped to earth the following day, near noon, and transformed the smallest twigs into coral clusters which seemed the fruition of the sands. During the halt the men gathered a quantity of the locusts, which they fried in oil. They set more to boiling, dried them, sprinkled them with salt, a provision for the future, for a counter-rezzou must be sparing of food.

As was seemly for a nomad chieftain, Marçay greeted as a gift from heaven this miraculous rain of food. He was less taciturn than usual at the evening's halt, and remained near Kermeur. Fennec was preparing their meal, pastes seasoned with a spoonful of Tuareg butter. Lazraf scraped a cake made of ground wheat baked under ashes, from which he was cleaning a coating of cinders and sand. After they had eaten the two officers sought their blankets. Night had fallen after a very brief twilight.

"Where can they be camping to-night?" Marçay mused aloud, haunted by the vision of the rezzou. "To think that there is nothing between us, save perhaps a caravan's camp! But can one

ever know who crosses the desert, who is on the path, the devil knows where? I dreamed of their tracks again last night, phosphorescent spoors which I followed as I'd follow the stars."

Kermeur listened to him, neck resting on his folded arms. He imagined himself on the deck of a ship at sea, heaving on a long swell.

Suddenly the rasp of a carbine bolt drawn back and snapped shut broke the stillness, and a sentry called out—

"Who goes there?"

"Soldiers!" answered two men, who appeared to rise from among the Meharristes.

Immediately tufts of grass flamed up, and in the light of these improvised torches two couriers could be recognized, wrapped in their military burnouses. They had come toward the well on foot and had stumbled on the saddles of the sleeping men.

"Lieutenant Marcai?" they asked.

Marcai took the crumpled paper offered to him, drew near to one of the sputtering torches. Kermeur, shivering with the night cold, draped his burnous snugly, came toward the vacillating light.

"Now they're ours!" Marcai informed him, handing him the message. Kermeur read—

"Rezzou Ould Abidine surprised caravaners Hassi Tounassin, carried away nineteen camels, follows route direction southwest."

The goal of the Berabers, until then a secret, was revealed by this news. To surprise the caravaners at Hassi Tounassin, they had swung wide of the normal path. The reason for this spurt westward was to avoid the platoons of the Saoura Company, which might have been patrolling the region.

"Nothing for us to do except catch them," Marcai stated, his last doubt dispelled. He brought out the map supplied him by the army geographical service. "They'll reach the south of the Iguidi by Bou Bout or Grizim. But certainly they know we're after them."

The last torch sputtered out with a smoky reek. The disturbed camels complained loudly, fearing a hurried departure. When the men assembled, Kermeur himself believed that Marcai would order the start. The late comers were arriving, asking at random in the darkness—

"What news?"

"They're ours!"

"They're ours!" jubilant voices repeated.

"How can we sleep after this?" Marcai asked.

Until this moment he had lived in dread that the raiders would escape him and the certainty of an encounter stirred him to feverish elation. With Kermeur, he circulated in the awakened camp. White forms groped in the obscurity around them, seeking packs.

"What a dark night!" Marcai resumed. "If the rezzou stumbled into us as the two couriers did, what a fine scrap it would be. One can't see anything two yards away. Tuareg charging in with the lance would be a match for our carbines and grenades."

This was not the first time that Kermeur heard speak of the Tuareg of the heroic age, who attacked with the lance, and in his imagination the Berabers and Reguibats of the rezzou carried, instead of Winchesters or Belgian rifles, the lance and shield of the Amenokal's warriors.



THREE hours on foot, seven in the saddle; the squadron was covering sixty kilometers each day. Nothing lived under the immobile sky. Occasionally a white eagle was outlined by the thin black curve of its wing tips. Or a gray sand swallow, tired out, alighted on the rump of a camel, to dart off again.

Instead of being dissipated by passing time, the fatigue which had swooped upon Kermeur became heavier, increased in intensity until it startled him out of the torpor that came during long stretches under the sun. The hours on

foot tired him more and more. Should he at last doubt his strength, justify Marcaÿ's scorn?

After springy stretches of small dark pebbles, the soil became soft without warning; the little stones spread on, seemingly as solid as a pavement, yet breaking under foot, allowing one to sink to the ankle in "rotten earth". The feet had to be torn free in an effort that strained the tendons. A man swore—another—and soon the whole dismounted squadron was struggling over the soil. It was during one of these plights that the rear guard riders believed they heard the first shot, a detonation muffled by distance.

A quiver ran through the mired column. It was impossible to maneuver, to take the least measure for combat. Marcaÿ tried to turn back and reach his men when he saw the bewilderment of the disorderly files. But Targui, neck stretched out, fought against the reins, remained as if rooted to the ground, jaws tight, knees trembling. A clumsy clatter of weapons, oaths, the clanging of metal objects mingled with the cries of the beaten animals. What a target for a hundred Winchesters!

Fortunately the shot had no echo.

This false alarm seemed to spur the camels, which matched their gait with Targui's stride. The weak animals, those with poorer blood, caught up at a jerky gallop. On their shoulders metal plates resounded like gongs, a staccato music that excited the others.

In the morning Kermeur had not been astride thirty minutes when he started to feel in his back the stiffness of the saddle. He would have liked to rest against the back, which a real rider must not touch any more than he should hold on to the cross-pommel. Although he changed position, shifted his weight from one thigh to the other, he was compelled at times to hold himself by hand, as if to rise from the saddle. His bare feet could not find the right spot. His knees were bent or his legs stretched out too far to keep the rhythm of the swinging

neck of his camel.

The night before the arrival at M'Dakane Well, the fatigue of ten hours of march kept him awake, all alone in his hollow bed dug in the sand. Of the picked squadron taking part in this great raid, he was the first, the only, man to suffer.

The column had almost exhausted its provision of water, but the Well of M'Dakane was near, and the mounts, lightened by the empty skins, sped onward as if they sensed the proximity of the source. M'Dakane—it was there that Lieutenant Costanzi had dragged himself, after forty-eight hours of march; Costanzi who had left his name to the hillock from which he had started. Kermeur wondered if he would leave his name to some hillock in his turn. In the Sahara such honor is paid for with life.

At the well Marcaÿ took charge of the watering. The camels drank from forty to fifty quarts each. The lieutenant often said that the whole trade of the Mehariste consisted in skilful watering, and he trusted no one to watch over it. The camels filed to the well, about fifteen inches wide, its depth shored with large stones. The men had rigged up a pulley, and when they hoisted the leather bucket, each pull was accompanied by a sharp squeak.

As they had eaten no meat since leaving Adghar, Marcaÿ permitted four men to go forth to hunt antelopes: Telli and Negoussi went in one direction, the former Italian Mehariste and his brother in another.

"But I forbid you to kill gazelles," Marcaÿ said. "And the fellow who shows me more than two empty clips for one antelope had better look out!"

The four men darted away like dogs unleashed. They were the first to leave the squadron. Gripped by unreasoning anxiety, Kermeur sought to follow them with his eyes. But they were absorbed by the sand. He then felt an uneasiness that amounted to dread. The weight of the heat on the nape of his neck, the

stiffness knotting his limbs, the aridity of the scenery and the sky, the torpor which stifled the cries of men as if they had been separated from him by long distances, gave him an inexpressible sensation of fatigue, of weariness, of death. Would he yield to this dizziness?

"The lieutenant is cleaning his Savage," Fennec told him. "It means we are getting near. From now on he'll clean it every day. If we meet the rez-zou the first bullet shall be for Si Mahmoud—may Allah greet his soul!" The orderly seemed absorbed in thoughts of his own after this speech, then resumed with a shake of the head, "Lazraf is said to be a good shot. But there is not in the South another such marksman as the lieutenant. I remember that at the end of the combat of Timissao, there were three Reguibat raiders hidden behind a boulder, shooting at Lieutenant Bettini. The lieutenant picked them for targets. His bullets chipped the rock near them so you could see the chips fly off like wasps. The raiders had to stop shooting. Belkheir must remember."

This was the first time that Fennec showed a generous sentiment. For a few seconds the enthusiasm with which he spoke of Marcai transfigured him, and Kermeur admired this miracle—a chief whose influence was able to ennoble the crudest man.

Marcai was seated near the well, which no camel could reach without passing before him. He rubbed the barrel of his carbine with a woolen rag. It was a handsome weapon, a sporting model Savage, the gift of an officer of the English Camel Corps. He had notched the stock for each enemy dropped by its bullets. There were thirteen notches, each one inlaid with a thin stripe of silver.

Toward evening the two brothers returned from the hunt. Then Telli came back alone, explaining that Negoussi had left him to follow a herd and that he had waited for him in vain. The three brought back six antelopes, which were

dropped in the center of the camp. One wondered how these beasts found food in the desert. They were cut to pieces quickly, in morsels of equal size, and the distribution started, directed by Marcai.

"For Lieutenant Marcai—" Belkheir touched the first lump with his whip. "For Lieutenant Kermeur—" he touched another.

Fennec claimed the tongue as due his master. The hunters were entitled to the kidneys, the brains, to the hide of the neck, which is used to manufacture sandals.

The distribution over, Kermeur retired to his hole in the sand, lined with dried grass like those of the Chaamba. The saddle bundled in gray blankets formed a breastwork on the western side of each hole.

Nothing could be heard save the sinister chuckling of the hyenas, who roamed near, attracted by the smell of fresh meat, and the jackals' howling.

Kermeur was burning with fever. Even bundled in the blankets taken from his pack, the slightest movement of his feet created a draft of air which set him to quivering. If he turned from one side to the other, the icy wind swept under his burnous and dried the sweat dripping on his temples. If he felt worse, upon whom would he call? Of all these corpses, which one would have left his grave to fetch him water? He lay down again.

The wind crackled sand against his saddle, wafted the strong stench of the tar smeared on the animals' itch and the acrid odor of camel. Kermeur drew the moist cloth of the veil over his eyes, sank deeper into the earth.

CHAPTER IV

DESERT TOLL

"HIS lost!" a voice said.
"A hunter such as he? A guide?"

"The Berabers came as far as the Gara in 1925. They may have come again. Who knows?"

Negoussi had returned to camp about midnight, reported to Mar cay. He said that he had pursued a wounded gazelle for twenty kilometers. He had killed it, skinned it, and had hung the carcass on a *thalla* tree, out of reach of the jackals. He begged Mar cay for permission to go back and fetch it in the morning, with his camel. The officer refused. As a joke, he suggested that if Negoussi wanted the gazelle, he might go and seek it afoot. Negoussi had accepted this literally. When the whistle blew in the morning he was gone, although his camel was kneeling with the others. Had he fallen under Beraber bullets? Improbable though this might be, no one protested against this explanation.

"We'll wait for him fifteen minutes," Mar cay said.

Camp should have been broken up long ago. The slanting sun lighted the copper utensils, the steel of the carbines and machine guns.

Furtively Cheikh ben Kouider drew aside his faded *gandoura* and spat on his chest. Fennec saw him do this. A man who is afraid spits on his naked flesh to ward off evil.

"Never mind; he can join us by following our tracks," Mar cay said when the fifteen minutes had elapsed.

The Chaamba pulled on the reins amid the usual concert of the camels, and one after another, heavier, slower than on other mornings, they left the well.

But the man who brought up the rear uttered an exclamation of joy. He had seen Negoussi hurrying toward them, the gazelle slung across his shoulders, outlined against the sun. They halted to await the hunter. Laughter greeted him. He walked straight toward Mar cay and, resigned as a begging dog, said—

"You gave me permission."

"You've been punished enough," Mar cay said, mollified. "Twenty and twenty more, forty kilometers on foot in one night! And we have a tough day ahead of us."

The squadron kept on at a quickened gait. At last it covered the last league of approach and attained the foot of the tall dune dominating the Mlehass Well—water seeping between slabs of schist. Above the well a few tufts clung to the last slope, but these dwindled and died out on the steep dune from which the wind blew sand like thin smoke.

Carbine slung from one shoulder, the man assigned as lookout climbed up the dune on all fours, leaving gigantic tracks behind him. Soon he was merely a black silhouette against the luminous sky. Mar cay followed him.

The failing light distorted the scene. Behind him undulated the crests of the chain of dunes skirted in turn by the column. In this panorama, where perspective did not exist, the nearest chain of dunes could not be discerned from the preceding chains. The slanting rays of the sinking sun struck the cruppers of these dunes with fiery red, shifting to deep blue in the smooth hollows. Yet Mar cay recognized, behind the dunes, the place where the column had camped, the gloomy horizon of the stony zone, beyond which the crows of Adghar had not followed.

The *sif*, saber blade edge, of the dune on which his feet rested, which crumbled beneath his weight, marked the extreme limit of security. On the west the stone desert spread, the hue of dead sunlight. It darkened from minute to minute, like a sea dulled by storm clouds. The *rez-zou* must be near. A few days' journey, and the shots would crack out one morning, around a well, over a few piles of ashes.

The water was abundant, and the watering progressed swiftly. When Mar cay came down from the dune, the men crowded around him. They knew that they were on the threshold of the Reg el Aftoute, the Country of Thirst, and in the danger zone. Therefore their chief broke his habit and consented to speak.

"We have reached the Reg el Aftoute. You know what that means. I expect the strictest discipline from now on.

Negoussi, if you leave to chase a gazelle, my first bullet will be for you; you're warned. We may stumble over the Berabers any moment. They have with them stolen camels, which they must not be allowed to keep."

The nomad quivered. For three years they had not captured a single camel. And the animals taken from the rezzou would be legitimate loot!

For the last time, as the camp was hidden by the dune, fires were allowed to burn. But war precautions were taken; the men loaded their carbines, slept with their ammunition bandoleers on them. Kermeur received orders to go on inspection alternately with Marcey throughout the night. The appearance of the camp had changed. The shelters were aligned regularly on all four sides, the packs and saddles disposed to form breastworks. The two machine guns were ready, at the angles.

"Negoussi returned," Kermeur addressed Fennec late that night. "No sick man as yet."

As he spoke he shivered with fever.

"Not one—yet," Fennec agreed; adding after a perceptible hesitation, "But until now, it was nothing. We were traveling like a caravan. Now, only the strong will be able to stick."



THE fate of the column now rested upon the guides. There were no more piles of stones to mark the path to the wells.

A kilometer ahead walked the white silhouettes of the guides, the high shapes of their camels. The whole squadron swerved when they swerved. A kilometer away on either side marched the flankers, vanishing occasionally into the hollow of a dune, as if mute shots had dropped them, to emerge, swaying busts on invisible mounts.

The main body of the column advanced by squads, forming a hollow in the center for the pack animals. Then came the three riders of the rear guard, with the endless white space closing behind them.

Two hundred and fifty kilometers into the west, without a water hole, spread the Reg el Aftoute, mournful succession of somber knolls drifting down to plain level in streams of fine sand. There were flat stretches on which the sinking sun reflected as on a sword blade, and the moon as on a silvery sea. A thousand lakes, changing shape and place every instant, scintillated before the thirsty column, strung out until they became but a single, dazzling sheet.

Kermeur, huddled on the saddle, felt the sweat leak from his armpits and temples; his lips were hardened like strips of leather. Time after time he saw the guides plunge into cool water, the hallucination of delirium.

"The Demons' Hillock," Belkheir announced, on the second day.

He indicated a stony slope, rearing its rigid, purple flanks before them.

Kermeur imagined he beheld a gigantic shrine such as existed on the roads of his native Brittany. He asked himself an anxious question: How long would he last? Although Marcey seemed proof against hardships, Kermeur suffered from actual burns; his nose and cheeks were flaking.

To the hardness of the pebbles, which jarred the limbs of the camels, to the sickening taste of the tepid, brackish water made greasy by the rancid butter once held in the skins in which it had putrefied for days, was added the daily test of the sand wind, which arose regularly about midday. The men felt it most when they dismounted to cross stretches of soft sand. Then that wind seemed to blow flush with the surface of the ground, prickling the faces and hands with a thousand punctures. When the whirlwind had passed, the riders carefully cleaned their saddles of the dust with their breath.

It became dangerous to go near the pack camels, which were enraged by the blows. When loading them, their drivers tied their jaws with stout ropes, knelt upon their heads. Despite all precautions, the detachment lost a camel. One

morning, S.153 was missing, an animal loaded with cartridges. Beaten by their furious drivers, the others increased their cries.

As S.153 carried ammunition for one of the machine guns, Marçay decided to send two men after the fugitive. They were to join the detachment by following its tracks. The two drivers vanished into the quivering air. They were the first men to be yielded to the desert, with little water in their *guerbas* and but scanty rations.

The animals showed traces of the cutting harshness of the stones. At each halt a few riders showed the sore hoofs of their camels. Marçay ordered their packs lightened, which meant additional weight for the robust mounts. The sick beasts were treated by their masters—a knife slash into the swollen, aching pallets. Kermeur suffered to see the camels cared for with barbaric remedies. Perhaps because he himself could not longer walk barefoot on the sand. The skin of his heels burned; blisters burst under his toes. The sharp stones had split the soles of his sandals as if with a razor. And fever never left him.

On the fifth day after leaving Mlehass Well he could not obey the signal to dismount. Marçay pretended not to notice this, avoiding the glance of Lazraf, who beheld for the first time in his life an officer in saddle when the column had been ordered to walk. Marçay dropped back to observe Kermeur, understanding he was in trouble. Once, when the Spahi's camel reached out toward a tuft of grass, Kermeur almost fell from the saddle.

"Lieutenant Kermeur said nothing to you?" Marçay asked Belkheir.

The sergeant shrugged. Why should he mix into his chiefs' business? The coldness that separated the two Frenchmen had appeared to him, from the first, an evil omen.

"No, nothing," he replied at last.

"He pulls too hard on the reins."

"Too hard. One would think he rode sleeping."

Held too short, not guided by the instinctive pressure of the foot which a true Mehariste alone knows how to apply, Kermeur's camel was losing ground, and soon was the last.

"Fennec!" the officer called out.

Fennec, who walked with his eyes lowered to the ground, seeking for chalcidony fragments, did not at once recognize the altered voice of his master.

"Fennec!" Kermeur called again.

Shaken by fever, the officer could no longer endure the anguish which had gripped him from the start.

"Don't leave me," he said, with an effort, when his orderly reached his side.

"Evil day, Belkheir!" Marçay murmured to the sergeant. "S.153 lost, two men gone." He repressed a gesture of dread. "Now, Lieutenant Kermeur—"

"He's in a bad way," Belkheir agreed. He had noticed Fennec's move to help the officer. "How far will they lag?"

Kermeur and his orderly had lost so much ground that the three riders of the rear guard were almost upon them. Marçay whirled Targui about and went toward Kermeur at a long trot.

"Why didn't you speak?" he asked him, rough reproach in his tone. Kermeur started, as if awakened from sleep, automatically prodded his camel, which Marçay caught by the reins. The senior lieutenant resumed, in a lower voice, "And I walked with the guides, like a brute, without noticing anything."

How had he failed to note the fatigue of the Spahi, his shining eyes, the moist temples, the features drawn thin and lined by a lingering illness? Too clumsy to voice encouragement, Marçay resumed the ride, silent at Kermeur's side.



FOR hours Kermeur had gone forward in a fog of thirst, weariness, fever and sun. This rough friendliness, the awkward remorse he guessed in Marçay's words brought him the balm he had craved, the only possible help. For the first time the officers were riding side by side, and the men who had slowed

down to permit them to pass had the dim sensation that from now on the column was fused into one, without a crack.

"Too late," Belkheir murmured.

At noon the sand wind lifted so strongly that the Chaamba had to shake their blankets and eat singly, hooded in the burnouses, which, draped before their faces, transformed them into veiled statues. The camp was saddened by an atmosphere of mourning.

In an attempt to shelter Kermeur against the wind, Mar cay ordered a blanket stretched on props. But the sand, trickling in the folds of the veils, sprinkled the rice, which had to be swallowed without mastication, because the grit irritated the gums. As the water contained magnesia, Kermeur could not even drink tea.

"A fit of fever—a fit of fever," Mar cay grumbled, looking at his bleary eyes and haggard mask. "It's been lasting a long time. Why didn't you mention it? Cursed land—and no doctor with us. We'll have to double your dose of quinine."

Never before had Mar cay complained because physicians were not assigned to desert detachments. A sick man or a dead man, that was all one in the Sahara. But his grouchy words gave Kermeur the friendship he had yearned for. He swallowed a mouthful with an effort.

"Don't worry—I'm used to these fits," he said. "I know that in four or five days it will be over. Just time for us to catch up with the rezzou. Look, I had my hair shaved, too."

With the pride of a child, he bared his brow, shaved with a knife. It was hard to recognize the Spahi officer in his convict's head. Moved, Mar cay reached out and drew the moist cloth into place.

That night after Mar cay had inspected the lines of the camp bristling with rifles, the two men who had left to seek the stray camel had not rejoined.

"Two men lost," he said to Lazraf.

"It's the beginning," the Chaamba replied with resignation.

Surrounded by the howling of jackals, the cries of the camels seemed the moaning of wounded animals. Mar cay hesitated to go back to Kermeur, who had inquired about the two men twenty times that afternoon. But Fennec came.

"Lieutenant Kermeur is ill," he said.

Mar cay went to stretch himself beside the Spahi. After a space the sick man, who tossed ceaselessly with a constant rustling of dried grass, spoke.

"The two drivers did not come back?"

"Not yet," Mar cay replied. "But they may be delayed. Camels sometimes run so far."

"During each raid," Kermeur resumed after a silence, "you must drop a few men on the way?"

"A few."

"The sick—those who can't keep up?"

"We have none this time."

"Not as yet, not as yet. Tomorrow I'll be all right. A bit stiff, but it'll be over."

"Surely! For I need you. Our Chaamba are hardened, but the time is coming when we'll have to take them in hand, cheer them up, carry them along as if on our hands. If we don't find the tracks of the Berabers soon, if the men see the chance of loot dwindling, if the water runs short, if the animals suffer, then it will be our turn to show our strength. I shall need you."

As he spoke these words Mar cay was aware that he was not prompted only by charity, by the wish to encourage and support his disabled comrade. Since he had rested near the trembling body of Kermeur, so near that he could feel the violent pulsation of his fever in his own arm, he felt himself threatened by the heavy sensation of loneliness which, since the death of Bettini, had so often crushed him, and which was hovering near again.

This sentiment was the stronger because it was increased by a clear, sharp remorse. Had he not failed, through his *esprit de corps*, in his duties as a chief? And, what was worse, in the due comradeship of the desert? This be-

wildered fellow, exiled in the South, had not merited scorn. Mar cay should have upheld him morally, should have taught him the trade, caused him to be accepted as a leader by the Chaamba. Did not the law of the Saharans ordain confidence between comrades?

When a column is in the field the chief must watch how the camels march, how the men bear up. He lightens the load of the wounded, he distributes the available strength. And for several days Kermeur had kept on alone, undermined by fatigue, by silence, by fever.

When the fever abated somewhat the Spahi asked for a cigaret. After lighting it, he blew out the flame of the lighter.

"Evil omen!" Fennec murmured.

He had reached out too late to prevent his chief's gesture. To blow out a flame portends evil. But Mar cay alone heard.

"You'll continue marching with the guides?" Kermeur asked, before dropping off to sleep.

"Yes," Mar cay answered. "As long as you are in command of the main body. From tomorrow on I give you Sergeant Belkheir for your second."

CHAPTER V

THE NOMADS

THE following morning Kermeur rode at the head of the column, between his orderly and Sergeant Belkheir. At this post of command he felt new life flowing within him, which almost dispelled the ache of the fever in his loins. Never had the mirage been so sparkling.

"I can't see well. Have you seen the movement of the guides?" he asked Belkheir at ten o'clock.

"Telli just signaled he's turning left."

The column swung on the trail like a well trained team. Belkheir, the most experienced man in the troop, the chief who ranked immediately below the two officers, looked at Kermeur constantly,

often drew nearer to communicate his impressions. It was not only upon orders that he now showed Kermeur the same respect he granted Mar cay, that yielded by a nomad to the tribal chief. For three days he had watched this man, a stranger, isolated, carry on without complaint, upheld against fatigue and sickness by sheer courage.

Once during the afternoon the riders of the rear guard signaled that the two drivers sent after the camel were in sight. But the intense glare had deceived them, and the march resumed.

"You don't think the drivers will come back?" Kermeur asked once more.

"Not now. It's too late."

"When they left, their *guerbas* were nearly empty," added Fennec.

"That will mean two rifles less to defend the pack train," Belkheir murmured. "That's what I said before they left."

Near evening of the nineteenth day of the raid, the guides disappeared, as if swallowed by the earth. Then, one by one, the first camels of the column followed them. The plateau was cut by a steep cliff, at the bottom of which wound the dry bed of the Thalla River, where all species of Saharan grasses grew so thickly that at certain spots, and from a certain angle, one might have believed it a smooth pasture land, spreading under the thalla trees, squat and round as apple trees.

The nearness of this vegetation on the arid plateau awoke mad hunger in the column. The animals lengthened the strides of their aching limbs on the last slabs of schist, leaving a trail of blood. The Oued el Thalla—the Thalla River! While the Chaamba camels, before they could be unloaded, grazed avidly on the dry prairie, those of the Ahaggar grouped about the trees, grasped the branches by the middle and, heedless of the thorns, stripped them to the bark with a single bite. Animals born for patience and poverty, nevertheless they were weakening.

An hour later Lazraf came to inform

Marcaay that Telli, chief of the guides, wished to speak to him privately. Marcaay asked Kermeur to remain at his side.

Seeing Telli walking toward their chiefs, a few men who had followed him at a distance tried to draw nearer. But Telli, after sweeping them with a suspicious glance, uttered his news in a low voice. He had gone upstream a few hundred meters to catch his mount which had tried to escape, and he had discovered, perhaps a kilometer from the camp, the tracks of seven camels.

"Seven camels which pastured there this very morning, but which did not stay long—"

"Heavily loaded?" Marcaay asked.

"Very lightly."

"Then they certainly were those of men equipped for war. They must have been in a hurry not to stop there longer."

"Yes, for aside from the Thalla River—"

"Aside from the Thalla River, it's most simple. Not a pasturing ground for one hundred kilometers in any direction."

Marcaay turned to Kermeur and questioned him as if his opinion had been of value.

"A hunting patrol of the rezzou, or a group sent out for observation? What do you think?"

Kermeur did not dare reply. The shadow of Marcaay lengthened endlessly on the ground. Tense moment. Had they found the miraculous tracks, the racks sought for so many days on the sand drifts, so long before it had been reasonable to expect them?

"They're our game," Sergeant Mohammed ben Ali, until then lost in the mass of men, spoke in a low voice.

"The tracks!"

The men called with one voice. In a single surge the whole camp was afoot. The riders ran toward their resting mounts. Marcaay gave orders. In haste, twenty camels were selected, their packs lightened, and the riders leaped into the saddles. Like an arrow Targui lengthened his strides. Within a few moments

Marcaay came to a halt before the tracks. They were deeply imprinted on the sand around the thalla trees which the seven camels had stripped.

Telli, one of the most famous guides in the South, picked up a few fragments of dung, crushed them between his hands, examined them against the light, squinting toward the sinking sun.

"How long had they gone without water?" Marcaay asked.

"Eight or nine days," Telli said.

"Good! They'll have to water at Chegga, and we'll be on them tomorrow night. Unless we bump into their patrol within an hour. That's what we'll see."

Under the whip Targui lowered his neck and plunged forward, followed by the twenty lightened camels. Five hundred meters farther, Mohammed pointed out, as they passed, three blackened stones around a heap of gray ashes and half burned coals. That fire had been alive at noon. The suspected camels could not be far away.

The detachment headed straight for the bluish hill which appeared very near against the horizon. A rise of ground had dropped like a screen as the camels raced, and seven animals suddenly were in sight—all seven ambling southward, grazing as they went. Behind them trudged two blue garbed silhouettes. But these silhouettes did not resemble Reguibats. Marcaay and Telli did not need to consult each other to know this. The guide slid to the ground and, in a gesture of utter discouragement, tore up an armful of grass which he offered to his camel.

"Jacannahs!" he grumbled.

Instead of a patrol from the rezzou, which would have fought back with rapid fire, these cameleers were poor nomads of a despised tribe. Surprised by the appearance of the Meharistes, the two short men dressed in blue, who carried their long flintlock rifles across their shoulders like shepherd crooks, had halted and were holding up their open hands in token of submission. Marcaay dropped his whip with a last oath, and

Targui slowly walked up to the group.

"What news?" the officer asked of the Jacannahs after the first greetings. He received the answer of the empty desert.

"All is well, *inshallah*!"

"You saw nothing on your path?"

"Nothing except old tracks near Hassi Chebbi."

"Very old?"

"Must have been six months old."

Six months—nothing—words of measureless time and space. In the thick silence, as night darkened the wide strand of sand, they sounded like eternity. And these were the only living beings that the column had encountered in twenty days of march, these two miserable Jacannahs, who came from Colomb-Bechar with their seven camels, and were bound for Taoudeni, there to load salt for the Sudan. They had been on the way for months, and would keep on for months. They would carry their undertaking to a successful conclusion, unless they were discovered by some rezzou. The presence of the Meharistes twenty days away from their station caused them to worry. It might mean that pillagers lurked in the vicinity. Was the detachment in pursuit of any one? As they did not dare ask questions, one of them spoke at random.

"When we left the South we saw the Sudanese on the tracks of raiders."

Marcay paid no heed to this news, which betrayed their fears. When they had drawn from their bags papers sticky with date juice, bearing the official seals of French West Africa and of Algeria, he gestured to permit them to leave.



MEANWHILE, Kermeur had spent the end of the day listening tensely for the slightest vibration in the silence. Had Marcay found the enemy? Would shots suddenly shatter the silence, echoing against the slopes as against rifle stands? For the first time Kermeur was really in charge, had the responsibility of the column. Despite the insistence of Belkheir, who had seen many men marked

by death, he refused to rest.

"Even if he runs into the rezzou's patrol," the veteran Saharan spoke reassuringly, "Lieutenant Marcay will send us a runner. I'm sure of that."

"We must be ready. Have the drivers closed in with all the pack camels?"

"Not one missing."

Kermeur felt strong now. The Chaamba gathered around him to seek from him movement and action. Upon his order, the camels had been brought close together, forming a massive square, ready to start at the first signal.

"You see nothing against the sun?"

Kermeur asked, a long hour after Marcay had left.

"No, nothing," Belkheir replied, his eyes shaded by the veil.

"If one stares too long into the west, one sees nothing except black spots. Nothing more."

"With this light, one must take care of the eyes. The best guide would be blinded," Belkheir admitted. But he thought of the tiny black disks which fever creates under men's eyelids.

The sun vanished, night came; there was no news.

"In the time the lieutenant has been gone," Belkheir said to Kermeur, "and at the pace set by Targui, he must have traveled far. As we have received no word, it means that the lieutenant is following the patrol by tracks."

"But—with the lead the others have—"

"He'll go on to the well."

"To Chegga Well?" Kermeur asked, worried.

"Yes. It's the only one where the rezzou might camp."

After night had fallen completely, Belkheir became certain that Marcay had gone on to Chegga.

"It isn't the first time that the lieutenant undertakes to reconnoiter a water hole alone."

"But the courier he was to have sent us?"

"He'll arrive during the night. Just in time for us to cover the distance to

the mountains, there to take position on the lower slopes."

"To attack the Berabers?"

"Tomorrow, at daylight. We'll turn the machine guns loose on the well. It's the best time, when they're saddling—in disorder. You should see the bullets mow them down!"

The confidence of the nomad gave strength to Kermeur—enough to keep him standing despite the returning fever and consequent dizziness. But this abnormal strength—would it last until the morning of the battle? Would it grant him the supreme joy of helping Marcai, of fighting at his side?

Although he had moments when he relapsed into semi-consciousness, the officer was aware that his men surrounded him with a new affection. He attributed this respect to his present situation as a chief designated to lead them under fire within a few hours. They saw in him only the victim of an evil which no amulet could prevent, neither the sulphur stone, nor the pierced sea shell, nor the verse of the Koran folded in a tiny bag of red leather such as was worn by both men and animals.

They watched him walking among them, testing with his shaking hands a load of cartridges, the fastenings of a machine gun, as if he had been borne by the will of the Beyond. A long time since he should have fallen, as had so many strong men they had seen.

No fires were permitted. At nine o'clock Fennec offered his master a piece of cold meat, thinking it would give him strength. But Kermeur could drink only a little water. Fennec dogged his steps constantly, with a too obvious solicitude. At last he slipped into the lieutenant's hand a polished, warm stone.

"An amulet?" Kermeur asked.

"An amulet should not come too late. It was merely a chalcedony stone—an agate—the most beautiful found by Fennec, which he had kept in his saddlebag for eight days. The native lied without remorse.

"I picked it for you," he murmured.



INSTEAD of the courier expected, Marcai returned to camp with the riders who had started so hopefully. The news that the tracks were those of two Jacannahs was a disappointment to all. The Meharistes, trailing their carbines and dragging their unloaded camels, sought their holes in the sand. Lying beside Kermeur, Marcai then related what had happened in detail. He hoped that the other would sleep.

Around midnight he heard him utter indistinct sounds.

"He's delirious," Lazraf said.

Marcai drew nearer to the wounded man. In his eyes the Spahi was indeed a wounded man—wounded in the battle against fatigue which had to be fought before the other, which was a drama without glory.

"Are you there?" Kermeur asked in a weak voice.

"Yes. I didn't leave you."

"Aren't you going to sleep?"

"I'll sleep. What about you?"

"Oh, I—"

Marcai draped the blankets over the feverish hands. Anguish twisted his heart. Since he had returned to find Kermeur standing in the center of the detachment, he recognized him as a comrade of combat. And he was about to lose this comrade, as he had lost Bettini.

"Thirsty?" he asked, with awkward tenderness.

"Thanks. The water is too warm—too bitter. It was a departure tonight, combat in the morning that I needed. I would have had the strength; something held me up. But now—"

"Don't tire yourself. You must rest—sleep."

But Kermeur continued speaking, in the agitation of fever, in a sort of half delirium. Marcai made no move, save to cover the moist hands, to replace the blankets which the wind tore aside constantly.

Kermeur's fever did not abate until dawn. When the time came to break camp, after a last consultation with

Lazraf and Belkheir, Marcai went to his comrade, who was rising with much effort, as if paralyzed by the cold of the morning.

"Belkheir also thinks it wiser. The day will be very hard. I'll give you four men and Fennec, and you'll go back with them to Adghar."

"Lose you five more men?" Kermeur protested. "If you leave me, leave me alone. But I don't want that! A day more—a day! I shall have strength."

Marcai lacked the courage to give the order. He discovered the real Kermeur too late. From that time on, it seemed to Marcai that he was in mourning for him. He thought—

"With closed eyes—I went on with my eyes closed, like a brute beast!"

And he could not find harsh enough words to brand himself.

Before giving the signal for departure he helped Kermeur into the saddle. Fennec knelt on the camel's head to prevent its rising too soon. The men stared as they beheld this dead man climb into the saddle. The officer of Spahis was not recognizable. His black beard made his eyes appear more brilliant, his cheeks more hollow; while his broad shoulders, drooped by fatigue, sagged beneath the long folds of the burnous.

In the same formation as on the preceding day, the column started. Despite the disappointment brought by the meeting with the two Jacannah cameleers, the sight of the first tracks on the sand had awakened in these men the instinct for the hunt. Moreover, near the Cliff of Hank, combat became certain, for the rezzou must cross it.

After an hour's march Fennec went to Marcai, who rode midway between the guides and the main body, and suggested:

"You wish to please Lieutenant Kermeur? He knows that Lieutenant Bettini always rode at your side. He often spoke to me about this, when I could not understand him. Have him march

near you. Then it will be best, for I am afraid."

Marcai therefore pretended to have called Fennec to bear a message to Kermeur:

"The guides signal the line of Hank. Lieutenant Marcai will drop back to ride with the column."

And a few instants later Marcai was beside Kermeur, not to leave him again, marching as he had marched in the past at the side of Bettini.

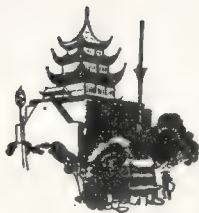
The Cliff of Hank appeared on the extreme horizon like a thin blue line. It was a wall of schist one hundred feet high, stretching for over five hundred kilometers, and from afar gave the impression of a mountain range. During the afternoon, as the cliff changed to a darker hue when they drew nearer, confusion broke out at the head of the column. Milling in panic, the pack camels clattered the machine gun parts.

"Lieutenant Kermeur just fell!" some one cried in the tumult.

It was true; reaching the limit of his endurance, Kermeur had dropped from the saddle.

Fennec leaped to the ground to pick him up. But swiftly as he moved, Marcai was before him, and lifted the lieutenant in his arms. Together they hoisted Kermeur on to his camel, which he could no longer guide. Marcai ordered the animal fastened to Targui. Then the strange procession continued on its path at a slower pace. Marcai turned from time to time. He did not dare take his eyes for long from the camel and the man it bore. Kermeur clung to the saddle with both hands. Fennec rode near, ready to break his fall.

"One might think a corpse in the saddle," a voice said, too loudly. In the winding column, where all torsos swayed easily on the humps of the camels, Kermeur's silhouette alone was stiff, lifted by some jerky stride, to sag heavily again, like an idol too heavy for its pedestal.



SPEED

By JAMES W. BENNETT

HAVING been told that the Sumatran volcano at Brastagi was an exceedingly active one, I arranged at the hotel in Medan to hire a motor car and see it. I stipulated that the driver must be safe. He must, above all, be *slow*. I had just come from China where a wild chauffeur had run over a coolie and two babies in a single afternoon. The strain on my nerves and pocketbook had been extreme. The Dutch hotel clerk promised that my wishes would be respected.

The Malay driver whom he engaged wore the green fez. I took some comfort in that. Any man who had been to Mecca must be of a pious and reflective turn of mind.

Certainly the outward trip was decorous. Soon we left behind the moist, hot jungle, the sluggish river with crocodiles sunning themselves on the banks, the monkeys scolding in the trees. The green of rice paddies and the silvery shadows of malacca woods were lost as the road rose in sharp hairpin curves. The six thousand feet from sea level to Brastagi were accomplished sanely in four hours.

Clouds were boiling in the sky as we started back. The driver spoke to me in Malay and pointed to them. He smiled. I smiled.

"Yes, very pretty." I said. "Nice scenery—"

Then, I was thrown from my seat on to the footboard. With difficulty I crawled back. That wretched Malay was hurtling down the mountainside at what seemed mile-a-minute speed.

"Here!" I shouted. "Not so fast!"

He turned briefly and his teeth gleamed ferociously. In fact, the man

looked slightly demented. We negotiated the first hairpin curve at a pace that I never wish to repeat. Had that pilgrimage to Mecca addled his head? Was he vowed to kill an Unbeliever—even at the price of his own life? Another curve, and another!

Thunder suddenly rolled; lightning flashed. The next moment the rain sheeted down. I touched the Malay's shoulder and humbly pantomimed the act of putting up side curtains. He shook his head and drove on. Faster! Faster! Now we had the added danger of a flooded road. Once we skidded half off the edge and hung for a heart stilling second between earth and eternity. The driver lost his fez. But did he stop to retrieve it? He did not!

How we got down, I shall never know; but at last the car rolled smoothly into the valley. And then—then, when the risk was over, when he could safely indulge in his horrid mania, he slowed down to a decorous twenty miles an hour. And maintained that speed until we reached the hotel at Medan.

Into the hotel I rushed, blood in my eye.

"I want this driver arrested! He's a homicidal maniac! He's run amok!"

The Dutch hotel clerk lifted a hand to silence me.

"We've just gotten the news over the wire. There's been a big cloudburst. Your road was obliterated. Your driver kept just ahead of the storm. If he hadn't driven like mad, your car would have been washed down about six thousand feet of mountainside."

I understood, then, why the Malay driver hadn't stopped to pick up his fez.



KING *of the* SCRUB

By HENRY G. LAMOND

THE gray dawn came sneaking through the tangle of mulga trees, supplejack, leopardwood and twisted vines. The fingers of light probed that maze and brought objects into view which, but a few minutes previously, were indistinct blurs without shape or outline. A red blob of nothing stood stark and clear as an ant heap; a gray cloud which seemed to rest on the earth was a patch of wire grass; and that black line which seemed to be a sinuous serpent in its contortions was naught but the outline of a dead tree lying on the ground.

Then something moved. Till it moved it had been shrouded in a veil of invisibility. With that movement it threw away the last clinging shreds of gloom, and the whole scene stood snapshot clear in its brightness.

It was a cow which had moved. She was long of horn and rakish of body. Her head was lean and narrow, and her body was of the slabsided kind which

denotes speed. The black tips to her upturned horns bespoke Devon blood in her breeding. The run-out roan, and the white stripe down her back, told of a mixture of Hereford and shorthorn in her pedigree. The brindle stripes over her body may have been inherited from anywhere.

Of her many ancestors, one of the male side had been a show ring champion. She herself was a mongrel, a brumby, a scrubber—one of the wild cattle of the scrubs of Central Queensland. Five or six generations back her maternal progenitor had felt the wild urgings. She had gone bush and joined the scrubbers. That cow touched by the rosy glint of the rising sun was the result of all that promiscuous breeding.

The cow lowered her head and licked at something lying on the ground, all the time mumbling deep down in her throat in a constant purr of love. That something moved and staggered to its feet. It was a calf—a red-roan fellow

slashed with brindle markings and with a blotched white face which showed his trace of Hereford blood. He was newly born, uncertain on his feet, and he swayed and shook as his mother's rough tongue towed him from nose to tail. Though his knowledge of the world was less than nothing, he didn't hesitate. He knew what he wanted. He knew where to get it. He went straight to his mother's flank and slobbered about her udder.

That calf drank lustily. He gulped till his distended paunch swelled hideously, till his breath came in short pants and till strings of milky saliva flowed from his mouth. Then he lay down to sleep. He turned round once—after the manner of all wild things before lying down—and then curled himself and lay still. And no sooner had he sunk to utter immobility than he disappeared into nothing! The earth absorbed him, his surroundings assimilated him, and merely by staying still he became part of the earth and of his surroundings.

The cow, his mother, stood over him. The rules were that she should stay with him till night, and then she would lead him to water while she drank. But her labors had been prolonged, and she was racked with the fever of travail. Her eyes were bloodshot and hollow, and her flanks were drawn till almost they seemed to pinch her hips. She moved uneasily as she hesitated in doubt. Then she leaned forward suddenly and nuzzled the little fellow—a touch of reassurance and comfort—and she was gone. She had faded from the picture almost as a shadow dissolves when the sun touches it.

Half an hour later that cow sneaked out of the edge of the scrub and on the plains which she dreaded by daylight. The water was five miles away. Straight as a line may be drawn she made for it. She was nervous. She was in a hurry. She glanced back once to the scrub, and then she stepped out bravely. All the great powers of mother

love could not allay the slow and constant torture of thirst.

The calf lay where his mother had left him. He was just a motionless shadow half hidden in the grass and blending with the shades of the mulga. He would not move. He would die there before he altered his position. That was the training of ten thousand times ten thousand generations, all blended and intensified, and which was the predominant trait of the young calf. He must not alter his position till his mother returned. He lay there, his head curled back on his flank, his eyes shut.

A red dingo came sliding through the timber. It also moved as a shadow progressed. A faint tang in the air told it there was something unusual about. It pressed forward. Suddenly it started. It had blundered over the sleeping calf! The dog's first thought was of a trap. It sprang away, faced about and snapped viciously.

The calf never moved. One ear flickered slightly, and its body pulsed to the poundings of its heart. It knew the danger. That was an instinct handed down through countless generations. But it never moved.

The dingo was only a young dog. This was something a bit out of its line. It sat back to review the position. It also never moved, and certainly it made no sound. But within half an hour another dingo came slinking through the trees. An hour later one more came, and it was closely followed by another. As if controlled by one brain those dogs spread themselves till they surrounded the sleeping calf. They waited for a sign from their leader. It was not their method to make a direct attack on anything of size. Lambs, rabbits and other inoffensive things could be snapped up; but this calf was different. It might be offensive.

The dogs preferred to have it running. They would pull it down in the chase readily enough. But to go in on the thing in cold blood was a character lacking in the dingoes' composi-

tion. They waited. Time was no object with them. Experts in such things that they were, they could tell by the quivering skin and throbbing body that the calf's nerves were near the breaking point. Soon it would get up and run. Then they would act.

The cow had reached the water. She threaded her way nervously through the station cattle gathered at the hole, avoiding their attentions as much as possible, and eagerly she sank her muzzle to drink. And she had not taken more than four long, lingering gulps when she lifted her head. With less than the mere edge taken off her thirst she swung about and left the hole in a hurry. She ran straight up the bank and, with her swollen udder swaying between her legs, she struck a line over the plains on her way back to the scrub!

The dingoes may have gathered in answer to the telepathic call of their mate when it found the calf. Certainly, also, wild mothers have the ability to pick up distant calls from their young when they are in danger.

The dogs, tired of waiting, were drawing closer to the sleeping calf. One, a red fellow with a white chest, was poisoning for a rush at the motionless object when there came to him the drumming of racing hoofs and the cracking of boughs caused by some large animal in a hurry. The other dingoes heard it and drew back to listen. The calf heard it and swung his ears in the direction from which the sound came.

The cow, a roan-clothed fury, hazy in her outline and haste, burst through the trees. With a bellowing gulp of rage she swung living lances tipped with death at one dingo, then she wheeled as on a pivot, and her splayed hoofs ripped a ribbon of hair from another dog's ribs.

Like a bouncing ball she leaped, and with the crunching crack of breaking ribs she smashed the dog she had wounded. She ripped with her horns, rolling and worrying the body of what

had been a living dingo.

Mysteriously, drawn by the soundless call of the mob, other cattle came streaming through the thicket. They lifted up their voices in a bedlam of fury and applause as the distracted mother pounded her enemy to a pulp. They collected about her when she mothered her calf. They absorbed her in the mob, and they melted through the mulga and disappeared when she was ready to go with them.



DURING the next twelve months the calf learned the rules of the mob. Led by the wise old bull, his father, the mob only went to water and out on the dreaded plains during the darkness of night. All day they skulked hidden in the thickest timber.

The youngster learned to analyze the wind and the scents it carried to him. He was taught to diagnose sound and the dangers it implied. He could discriminate between the hoofbeats of a ridden horse and one roaming free. He knew the thump of alarm of the kangaroo, the warning call of a bird. Especially he learned to obey without hesitation the whims of the lord of the mob.

This leader was a lean old bull, long of horn and short of temper. He had been bred a scrubber. His markings and shape proved it. His head and shoulders were elephantine in their proportions. His body tapered away almost to nothing, being slabsided and light of ham. But he had wisdom. He knew the meaning of a stirring leaf. He could catch a taint on the wind before other cattle knew there was a wind blowing. Above all, he had the right which only might gives in the wild.

The scars which wealed his flanks and ribs spoke of many battles fought. That he had won those fights was proven by the fact that he was alive with a mob of his own. He was a deep red, with the telltale brindle markings of a scrubber, and though weighted with

years he was as light and active on his feet as a ballet dancer. That was the lord of the mob, and so well known was he to the stockmen of the station that already he was honored with a name. He was known as the King.

Before he was twelve months old the calf noticed a change in his mother. She avoided him. She repulsed him. She refused his demands for a drink when he wished. The calf cared little. He was reaching an age of independence, and already the sex urgings were stirring within him. His mother disappeared from the mob one day, and when she rejoined it another calf trotted at her side. Far from feeling any resentment of the little stranger, the young bull took it almost as a matter of course and finally left his mother. He mixed more with calves of his own age, and particularly with the young bulls—mickeys, as they are called by the stockmen.

Then, suddenly awakened in full, the passions of his sex took him. Indifferent to all about him, he paid his attentions to a cow. Suddenly he was lifted high, tossed and rolled on the ground. He picked himself up and looked about him. The King was standing near.

The King was shaking his head. He was switching his tail. A dull red glowed in his eyes. The tip of each horn was adorned with a small tuft of hair raked from the calf's belly. The King looked his part. The calf slunk away without shame and in a hurry. He joined mates of about his own age and sex, and with them he hovered about the outskirts of the mob.

The King took his cows farther into the scrub and over toward the range of rough hills. He knew, thus early in the season, that there would be water in that fastness for a month or more. They were safe there. There was feed in the scrubs for his small mob. As the smaller holes dried he could work back toward the edge nearer the permanent water on the downs—Poolpituri Hole. While the grass lasted in the scrub they pre-

ferred that to the danger of feeding out on the open plains, even though those excursions were made only at night.

The mickeys took a different course. The King refused to have them near his mob. The resistless urge of their sex demanded that they must mix with other cattle. The only other stock were station cattle which ran on the open downs and watered at Poolpituri. The mickeys fed on the downs near the edge of the scrub, ready to retreat into that sanctuary at the first warning. They sneaked out furtively and mingled with the station cattle. Gradually they became bolder. They mixed freely.

Some were wary; one of these was the calf with the blotched face. He kept to the scrubs. He enticed a cow or two to join him. He lost them and got others. But when the stockmen mustered that part of the country he was the only mickey within reach of the safety of the timber.

The other mickeys, running with the station cattle, were rounded up and driven away with the mob. They were to suffer the indignity of the knife and know the heat of the branding iron. But as soon as a mounted man came near him the mickey with red patches on a white face left his mob, and, like a charging comet in his fury, he fled for the scrub. The thunder of galloping hoofs gained on him, ranged up beside him, and then with the crash of reverberating thunder the lash of the whip bit into him like searing lighting.

The mickey doubled in on himself and let out another link of speed. The whip was rising and falling, and the smash of its thunder deafened him. Perhaps he was too far gone in fear to feel the biting agony of the lash. But red weals sprang into being, and floating cloudlets and ribbons of hair rose from his body. He was racing blindly, strings and streamers of saliva floating from his lips, when with a crash and a jar he took the scrub. The mulga quivered and cracked to the shock and a rain of leaves littered the ground.

But the man behind reined in his horse.

"It ain't worthwhile riskin' a good horse on a mongrel like you," he muttered. "I know you. We'll get you another time."

The mickey smashed his way through the trees. He raced till his heaving flanks refused to keep his lungs going, till his pounding heart shook him in tremors, till his legs quivered beneath him.

That was his first experience with man.

He stood beneath a tree, hidden in the heart of the scrub, till he cooled, till his legs were steady and his flanks ceased heaving. Then the biting agony of the whips cuts took him. He switched his tail in anger, he snorted and shook his head, and deep in his throat he mumbled while his eyes reddened and glared. His throat was burning and his mouth was parched. He wanted a drink—above everything else he wanted a drink. But he dared not go back across those hated plains until the darkness of night shielded him.



LATE that night the mickey ventured across to Poolpituri Hole. He drank and then mingled with a small mob of station cattle which the musterers had missed. Among them was an amorous cow. There was also a young bull about two years of age. The mickey dared to offer fight. He was tossed to one side. But he dropped to his chest, rubbed his stubs of horns on the ground and came again to the combat.

The other fellow was too old, too heavy, too well armed and too active. He brushed the mickey's guard aside, ripping him from shoulder to flank. He rolled him over. He knelt on him, and slobbered him in his anger. He bruised and pounded him till but a spark of life was left in the mickey's body. Then, as he drew off for a minute to catch his breath and view his work, the mickey scrambled to his feet and fled like a rocket. His spirit was not broken. It

was merely that he had a brain of discretion.

Sore in mind and body, the mickey sulked all that day in the shelter of the scrub. He did not want company. His nose and instinct told him where the King ran with his mob. He did not seek them. When night again let down her shroud of darkness the mickey struck due west. Mile after mile was thrown behind him, and his shoulders worked with the rhythmic precision of pistons in their action. He did not know where he was going. He was following a blind impulse which would lead him to safety somewhere.

The rising sun found him twenty miles away standing at the edge of another patch of scrub with rough country behind him. He looked out on the well worn pads which radiated like the spokes of a wheel from a common center. He did not reason. He knew without reasoning that those pads denoted a permanent water and the presence of other cattle in numbers.

For nearly three years the mickey was lost to sight. No man saw him. But the stockmen noted a number of calves, all with red patched faces, rakish of build and, by their judgment, scrub bred wasters. Those calves were all the progeny of cows running on that area. They suspected a scrub bull. They had no evidence other than those calves.

The bull, a mickey no longer, lived in comparative content in his new country. He ventured out for a drink at night. He captured cows from the station herd. But they did not have the wild blood and the scrub bred training. They would not stay scrubbers. The bull watched them return to the ways of domestic cattle without regret. There were plenty more. If he lost one he could always get another.

He knew—he had tested and proved it—that he could beat any station bull there in fight. Three whitened skeletons of what had once been bulls lay on the plains to prove his prowess. Other bulls had great scars running along their

ribs, torn buttocks and other evidence of battles fought—fought and lost.

The scrub fellow, of course, did not escape unscathed. He showed many white weals of scars which were badges of honor in his society. But where other bulls had been crippled, or their spirits broken, the scrubber remained active and light on his feet and with a belligerent pride which brooked no denial. With the passage of time he became less wary. He mixed more freely with the station cattle and even at times fed out on the downs with them in the daylight.

And then disaster came to him. He was feeding half a mile out from his scrub one morning when men started to muster the cattle running on that country. Worse, a mounted man was between him and his retreat. The scrubber did not hesitate. He put his head down, held his tail high and, in a straight-drawn line, he pounded the earth as he raced for the sanctuary of his scrub.

The stockman ranged beside him, and again the thunder of the whip and the biting agony of the lash bit him. The bull could not stand much of that. With the scrub a bare couple of hundred yards distant, he was rolling in his stride as he galloped. He wallowed from side to side in his action. The time was ripe for the man to act. The bull was big, heavy, cumbersome and tough. But the man was an adept tosser. He'd chance this big fellow, anyway.

He leaned forward in the saddle, catching the bull's flying tail in his hand. Synchronizing the action of his own horse and that of the bull, with one stupendous heave he would lift the bull in his stride, overbalance him and send him crashing to the ground—that is, he would give him a toss. He might, or he might not, hop off and tie the beast while it was struggling on the ground. In any case, such a toss brings the most unruly beast to its senses. If the first attempt fails, a second trial usually will achieve its end.

The man reckoned without the bull. As soon as he felt his tail taken the bull swung, pivoting on a pin's head, and with a wild gasp of rage he raked his sweeping horns in an upward swing at the same time. It was done with the speed of flashing light.

The horse had been racing with its head over the bull's body. As soon as the bull swung the horse raced past. Even so, those raking horns lifted a furrow of hair and grazed the flesh of the horse as he passed.

The bull never hesitated. The whole thing had been done in a shutter-click which amounted to no more than a stutter in his stride. As soon as the horse passed, the bull continued his mad race for the scrub. He hit the outside trees, not deigning to turn for them, and with a smash and a scatter of leaves he took his sanctuary. And a bare half length behind him, pressing on him, holding him for pace and galloping with him, was the mounted man.

They smashed through the timber at full gallop—the bull pounding his way through and the man swinging and swaying to dodge the blasting death which jogged his elbow and rode on his shoulders. In one slightly cleared patch a hundred yards in diameter the man and horse lay up on the bull. The man used the lead-loaded butt of his whip handle. And every time his arm fell a dull thud sounded on the bull's ribs. That devastating punishment was too much. The bull bailed up in a rocky gorge, his sides and back protected by boulders. The only approach was from the front. The bull's horn guarded that.

The man sat on his horse and surveyed the position. He was almost sobbing in his anger.

"If only I had a couple of dogs," he muttered. "If only I had a rifle—a pop-gun, a pea-shooter, anything at all! I'll get you, feller-me-lad!"

After the man had ridden away, and when the ground vibrations of his horse had faded, the bull stalked to a darker patch of timber. He stayed there all

day. He switched his tail continuously. He shook his head. His eyes never faded in their ruby glow. As soon as night came the bull left the timber. His cows were gone. He was upset, disturbed and restless. There was nothing to keep him in that area. He struck a line direct for the rising moon, and behind him a dark shadow grotesque in its uncouthness danced and bobbed over the grass.



MORNING found the bull back in his own scrub out from Poolpituri. He had come home. But he was too upset to rest. He was too sore to find any ease. The indignity he had suffered was too great to allow him to cool. All day he switched his tail in his anger. Continually he mumbled in hoarse bellows deep down in his throat. A dozen times he laid his head to the ground and raked the earth with his horns. Racked with thirst, as he was, he could not stay still.

When night came the bull was in a fever of temper, ready to fight anything which opposed him. With the devil's own desire for absolute and wanton supremacy, he strode out on the plains on his way to Poolpituri to drink.

He drank. He forced a way through the station cattle which were gathered there, disdaining to mix with them. And there was something about this horned fiend which made the station cattle stand aside and give him freedom of approach as he came near them. The bull came up the bank and out on the plain. He raked dust in billowing clouds above him, and his challenge of hate rang clear in a mighty bellow. And there was none there dared answer that call and take up the challenge.

About midnight, when the moon was topping the trees, a black procession, ghostly in its silence, filed across the plains to water. They came swiftly, not deigning to spread and feed as station cattle might do, and apparently with a set purpose. A few hundred yards from the hole the string stopped. A red bull

stood clear of them. He shook his head, and the moonlight danced and glimmered from those scimitars of horns. It was the King bringing his mob to drink. Always they stopped at that point, and always the King stood clear.

Then a mighty bellow rent the air. Almost it seemed the shocked wind sucked its breath in protest, and the leaves of the trees appeared to huddle closer together in their fear. It was the King's nightly challenge.

And this night another answered it. As great a voice rang out in answer, and a bull stood clear in the path of the scrubbers. It was the King's son newly returned to his home.

As the new bull came to meet him the King dropped to his chest and drove his horns along the ground. He stood and raked dust in waves above him. He followed all the rules of the etiquette of battle. His cows spread fanwise behind him. They were interested. This was a fight. Other cattle came running up from the hole and gathered from those feeding near.

The gladiators stood out clear, about twenty yards apart, and took measure of each other. They were well matched. The newcomer—he of the white face—was a shade smaller. But he was more active, younger, and, in spite of his youth, he had the experience of war. The King was old. But age had given him the weight which is essential to success, and what he lacked in agility was more than compensated for by added experience. They were well matched.

Each bull drew sucking breaths and swelled himself. Each lowered his head, opened his mouth slightly and, with lolling tongue, swept the ground. Each jambed his tail tight and arched his loins, every muscle taut and drawn. And each moved on stiff legs as he circled the other.

Like twin licks of flame they closed. There came the crash of horn locking, the thud of bodies meeting, and from those closed heads twin flames of red were reflected from the moon. Each

gathered himself together and pushed, heaving for victory. All the time their horns were rasping, probing, countering, feinting, guarding and searching an opening. They trampled the grass beneath them to chaff, and the torn earth rose in clouds of dust about them. They swung in combat, and those gigantic beasts were like lightning itself.

Gradually, an inch at a time and slowly, the King was being forced back. Strings of saliva flowed from his jaws, and red weals dripped blood from his ribs. An open wound on the youngster's neck gibbered horribly in the moonlight when he moved, and a flap of skin hung loose on his cheek. But he was pushing the King to defeat.

Something happened—something so lightning swift in its action that no eye could follow it. The King may have stumbled. The other may have slipped the guard. When the warriors stood clear of the dust the younger was standing beside the King, and his horn had ploughed a passage along his sire's ribs. More, it had entered the King's flank from beneath, and through that flap of skin ten inches of blood stained horn showed in the moonlight!

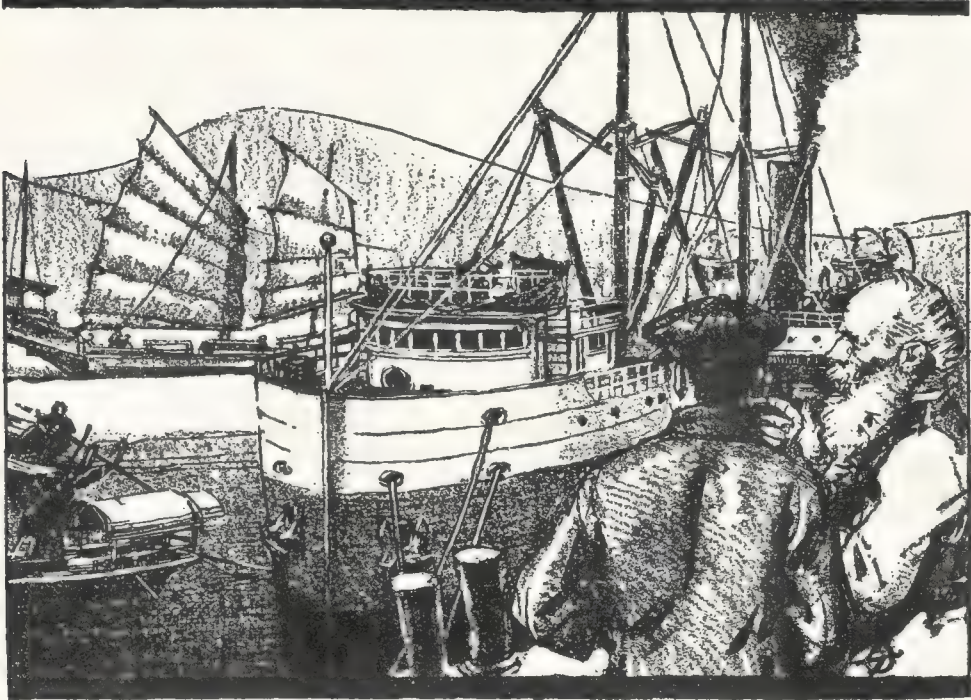
Any other bull would have broken and fled. The King lived up to his name. He swung again to the attack,

blind with pain and stupid with the nearness of defeat. As he swung he crashed into the trunk of a coolibah tree. That checked him, threw him off his balance, laid him open to attack.

The muscles of the youngster's great neck bulged and cracked as he lifted to the stupendous strain of the battle—he had sunk his horns into the King's belly and was throwing him. A bellow of anguish came from the old bull, and then as he fell a great gasp came from him. It was the end. With eyes of fire and with the temper of a fiend the young bull ripped and tore, pounded and pommelled. He knelt on his vanquished foe and sank his horns to the butts in that cringing body. He fought till the last breath left the King, and with a gasp and a gush of blood he lay still.

Bespattered with filth, flecked with foam and streaked with blood, the young bull stood clear. His mouth was open and his flanks were heaving. But he held his head high, his eyes glared, and there was the unmistakable mark of the victor in his bearing. He bellowed once in challenge. Then, without giving his cows a chance to have a drink, he gathered up the mob which had been the King's—now his by right of conquest—and led them back to the scrub where he was to reign in place of his sire.

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure* published twice a month at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1932. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared FRED LEWIS, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Treasurer of THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, publisher of *Adventure*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City. Editor, A. A. PROCTOR, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City. Managing Editor, VICTOR WEYBRIGHT, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City. Business Managers, None. 2. That the owner is: THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City, whose stockholder is: THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City, whose stockholders are: J. S. BACHE & Co., 42 Broadway, New York City, JOHN P. BOYLE, c/o MOORE & SCHLEY, 100 Broadway, New York City, JOHN J. JOHNSON, c/o Continental Illinois Bank & Trust Co., Chicago, Illinois, STANLEY R. LATSHAW, Butterick Building, 161 Sixth Ave., New York City, MERRICK & Co., c/o Customers Securities Dept. N. Y. Trust Co., 100 Broadway, New York City, MOORE & SCHLEY, 100 Broadway, New York City, JOS. A. MOORE, 300 Park Avenue, New York City, SAMUEL SCHWARZ, 18 Renner Ave., Newark, N. J., SHEARSON, HAMMILL & Co., 71 Broadway, New York City, WEBB WALKER, Medical Arts Bldg., Ft. Worth, Texas, WARWICK CORP., 910 S. Michigan Ave., Rm. 504, Chicago, Illinois, C. E. WELLES & Co., 39 Broadway, New York City. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: THE BOWERY SAVINGS BANK, 110 East 42nd Street, New York City (Holder of mortgage on real property). 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. FRED LEWIS, Treasurer. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of March, 1932. CHAPPELL CORY, JR. Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 206, Reg. No. 4-C-139. (My commission expires Mar. 30, 1934. [Seal]—Form 3526.—Ed. 1924.)



SALVAGE

By JACLAND MARMUR

THE monsoon was overdue. Singapore sweltered, panting for the humid night breeze, while somewhere westward in the Durian Strait the sun dipped leisurely toward the sea. A single file of coolies, blackened from coaling a P & O packet, their flat rattan hats askew, drooped dejectedly through the harbor gates like so many animated mushrooms. Street hawkers patterned the shadows of Tanjong Pagar, calling the shrill sing-song of their wares, immense trays of sickening sweets perched on shaven polls. The vague outlines of the shipping cast lengthening shadows upon the steaming land, but the heat was still intense—the sticky, clawing heat that has been known to drive white men mad.

At the foot of Anson Road, not far from the Keppel Harbor Docks, Lucky Harry Seward slouched toward the yawning mouth of a long, low godown. He wore a frayed patrol jacket and a battered gray cap, his hands sunk deep in the pockets of shabby drill trousers. He wandered with his eyes to the ground, the image of a thousand beachcombers adrift in the crossroads of the East; yet in spite of his hunched shoulders and his shambling gait, there was the unmistakable sway and roll of a deep water man in his walk, as if he had not yet quite forgotten the lift and surge of the open sea.

He hesitated at the entrance to the godown, dully inspecting a polished

nameplate of brass: "Captain Adam Schonberg, China Coast Service." Then he shrugged his shoulders and swayed into the darkness of the shed. The place smelled pungently of weird, outlandish things—dried China shrimp, salted cuttle bone, copra, palm oil, sisal and raw rubber. He sniffed the sharp odors of the world's cargoes, somewhat wistfully it seemed, and at length pushed open the door of a small office.

For a moment he could see nothing very clearly, for the little room was unlighted, and the dusk of the tropic night had crept prematurely into the cluttered sanctum of Captain Adam Schonberg. Ship's gear of every description lay scattered about the floor and, rising like an island from the midst of rope coils, anchor shackles and cargo blocks, a dilapidated teakwood desk raised its paper-strewn top.

Beyond the desk, facing the double window that looked out on the harbor, with his back to Harry Seward, a stoop shouldered old man stood eyeing the darkling copper and silver of Singapore Roads, leaning heavily on a gold knobbed Malacca cane. He turned very slowly at the sound of the opening door and, with the light behind him, nothing was visible of his face save a snow-white beard, a broad nose and two piercing blue eyes.

"Ja, *mein* friend?" The deep, rich bass voice echoed pleasantly and seemed to add a sense of serenity to the shadowy room.

"I came to see Captain Schonberg about—about a berth," Seward explained listlessly.

"Ah," the old man breathed. He was silent for a moment before he added, "There's a slush lamp hanging just over your head. Light it, will you please? *Danke*."

"I have no matches."

"On that desk."

Lucky Harry Seward fumbled for the box, lighted the lamp and turned again.

"You come from where?" Captain Schonberg asked.

"Beachcombers' Rest. They told me you needed an engineer."

"Ah, yes; a man. Ja, I need a man."

He combed his beard and stroked the sunburned crown of his bald head, then came forward with a distinct limp and sat down at his desk, laying his cane upon the scarred teak before him.

"Sit down on that rope coil, *mein* friend. You are an engineer?"

"Yes," Seward replied shortly.

"You are a young man. What papers do you hold?"

"Chief, unlimited. American."

Seward's gray eyes were cold, his lips a thin, bitter line, his jaw squared as if to receive an expected blow.

Old Schonberg looked at him, his large head uptilted so that his white beard lifted from his chest, displaying his strong neck and throat webbed with a network of wrinkles like mud baked hard and cracked by a pitiless sun.

The engineer slouched on a coil of three-inch manila, cap in hand, the yellow lamplight drenching his unkempt hair and bringing into sharp relief the features of a rather youthful face lined prematurely and set rigidly beneath a two days' stubble of reddish beard. Adam Schonberg sat quietly for a moment in his squeaky chair, idly drumming the desk top with long brown fingers.

"Beachcombers' Rest," he mused gently at last, almost to himself. "An appropriate name. And dey told you I needed an engineer. Did dey by any chance, *mein* friend, tell you anything of Adam Schonberg's Oriental merchant fleet?" The amazingly blue eyes in the leonine head twinkled brightly for an instant.

"They told me your fleet consisted of one crummy old hooker that isn't worth salvage money, with a three-legger engine in her that's falling to pieces." Seward bit this off in the challenging voice of a desperate man; then he added savagely, "They call it the Down and Out Line!"

Schonberg's full red lips widened in the pleasantest of grins, but his eyes had grown mournful, even wistful.

"You're very frank. No? You are down early to essential truths, I see. And you came to look for a berth aboard such a vessel?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"Because I'm down and out too. I want a ship, sir." Seward came violently to his feet. "I need a ship—damned bad!"

"You would be surprised to know how many men I have taken on in my life and sweated the gin and the despair out of. What was your last ship?"

Seward came rigidly erect. His fist closed tightly on the battered cap.

"The *Oriole*, Marlson Line out of Frisco in the Island trade. I was chief of her."

"Chief? You? You are a very young man for—"

"Yes, chief." Seward's voice was hollow. "I was the youngest chief engineer in the fleet. Lucky Harry Seward they called me."



OLD Schonberg relaxed in his chair, staring upward at the grim faced engineer from beneath his bushy brows in his sly, kindly way.

"Ah, yes," he mused softly. "I remember—in the papers. And how long ago was this?"

"Ten—eleven months." Seward hesitated, a haggard, hunted look coming into his eyes as he added firmly, "I drew a six-month suspension of license. They told me I was damned lucky it wasn't canceled entirely."

He stopped short on the last bitter words, looked down on Schonberg's face with fierce truculence, then back at the frame of the window.

Captain Adam Schonberg said nothing, and presently Seward's voice rushed on swiftly, as though, having been dammed up too long, like a river at freshet time, the words came pouring

from his tortured chest against his will.

"Running in fog, making the land on the coast. The Second was below. It was his watch. The bridge called for slow astern. I came down when I heard the bells. Crowley, the Second, sent her ahead from a full stop. We'd heard a steamer whistle dead ahead out of the blind whiteness. The bridge rang full astern, jangling the telegraph, just as I reached the second grating landing. Crowley rammed her full ahead. Read the telegraph wrong; went crazy with fright, maybe. I don't know. I came charging down the ladders, saw the telegraph face staring at me like a grinning monkey and sprang to the control throttle. I—I don't know. I must have gone wild. I flung Crowley aside. He staggered and crumpled to the floor plates. I got her going astern then, but we crashed—sank a big Jap collier. She went down like a ton of lead.

"The oiler of the watch, coming down from the refrigerator engine a minute later, saw me at the throttle and Crowley with a bloodied head against the leg of the log desk. He was a witness at the inquiry—so was Crowley, the Second. Swore he fought with me when I answered the bells wrong and that I attacked him. Protecting his own yellow hide! It was proved beyond any doubt that I was at the controls. What I told them didn't—"

Seward cut himself short abruptly, as if he hadn't ever intended to say a word about it at all and had just then realized that he'd been talking. His head snapped down and his hollow eyes fastened on the old man sitting quietly in his chair amid his clutter of second hand gear like some aged sea patriarch whose house had come down about his shoulders in a gale of wind.

"That's all," Seward bit off.

Schonberg met that tortured look unblinking and in silence.

"Wasn't it brought out at the inquiry," he mumbled placidly at length, "that Crowley was accustomed to heavy drinking? His reputation wasn't any

too good, was it?"

"That sounds like the inspector reading their damned report behind the closed doors of the Custom Building in Frisco!" Seward's voice was almost a shriek. "In view of my excellent past record and the doubtful integrity of Mr. Crowley," he mocked bitterly, "they didn't revoke my license!" His voice fell and with a hollow groan he ended dully, "They might as well have. How in hell do you know all this?" he demanded suddenly.

Adam Schonberg stood up, reaching for his Malacca cane.

"I make it *mein* business, Seward, to know ships—and men. It is a fascinating study. Fascinating," he repeated, half turning toward the darkening window, draining swiftly now of all light. "Yes," he uttered with sharp distinctness in the still room, "I need a man. *Aber ein Mann!* But he must be a man!"

Seward winced as if he had been struck full in the face.

"Do I look like a damned yellow rat?" he exploded savagely. And, whirling on his heel, he turned and made fiercely for the door.

Old Schonberg's agility was nothing short of amazing. Using his stick as a lever he swung himself bodily over the coiled rope. Then he shot his cane out briskly, its point touching the closed door, barring Seward's exit.

"Wait, you young fool!"

Seward's hand fell slowly from the knob and he waited, his stare challenging the glitter in the old man's eyes.

"You t'ink I am a board of inquiry captain?" the aged shipowner demanded suddenly. "You t'ink I believe a smear of red ink on the back of a ticket change a sailorman into a weasel? I have sailed ships before ever you knew what a spanner was—or before there was need for dem on vessels at sea! You young fool, you!" he repeated, his wrinkled, mobile face working excitedly as he spoke. "Sit down!"

He waved his cane toward the coil of

rope again and Seward sat down as the old man continued:

"I have seen too many of you lads go downchannel to the stinking dives—*verflucht!*—of Malay Street and the Praya Road here in Singapore because some fool of an official at home can not understand what goes on inside a man. You need a ship, and I need a man. I remember when I too needed a ship—damned bad."

The amazing old man's stooped shoulders suddenly squared, as if he remembered old glories and youthful conquests. His mellow bass, resonant with emotion, echoed musically in the shadow filled room as he brandished his cane.

"Ships! I will tell you somet'ing about ships. The *Preussian*, the *Potosi*, do you know dem? No! Windbags! From Hamburg, the North Sea and the Channel ports. Down the hell blowing forties for Cape Stiff. Hey! You didn't know dem ships of the Chile nitrate trade. So many days and no more, or you lost your command, no questions asked or answered! I was stiff with ice in a Cape Horn gale before you knew what a ship was made for, boy! Captain Adam Schonberg," he declaimed proudly with his cane held out like a pointing sword before him, "bark *Potosi*, fifty-three days—Chile to the South Foreland!"

Seward looked up at the burly old seaman, startled, sobered by the defiant ring of that booming voice.

"But I lost a leg in a hurricane," Schonberg went on, dully. "See?" He whacked his cane against his right leg. "Wood! I am good no more to drive big wind ships from one hole of the world to another."

He leaned forward calmly, both knotted fists on the knob of his cane as he spoke.

"So now I am a shipowner looking for a man. Would you like to be chief engineer of a 'crumby old hooker' called the *Lorna*," he asked softly, "with a 'three-legger engine in her that's falling to pieces?'"



LUCKY Harry Seward's set face relaxed slowly as he rose quietly to his feet.

"You mean you are offering me a chief's berth? Me?"

"Ja. I t'ink I have judgment for men. Yes. Why not?"

"I—when do I take hold?"

"Tonight, now! She is scheduled to sail on Thursday for Batavia and den Swatow—if you can get her running by den. Her boilers are full of leaking tubes. That much your predecessor told me. What else is the matter with her, I do not know, because I do not know engines. I know only men—and ships. I can buy you nothing for her. Do you understand? Nothing. You will have to do what you can, alone, with a half dozen Chinamen for crew. Come here."

Waving his hand, he walked with his limping gait to the window and flung it wide. Dark shadows ranged a littered pier. The sharp, sweet odor of the Eastern tropics welled thick and cloying about them.

"There she is, Seward!" He pointed to a dark hulk at the seaward edge of the jetty. "The *Lorna*. I will tell you something more. For two months maybe you will get no pay, maybe longer. Understand? No pay! I offer you a ship and a berth. The rest we must make for ourselves. There is food and a home, a little better than Beachcombers' Rest, but no money. *Verstehst?*"

"I—I'm your man, Captain," Seward breathed softly.

Old Schonberg turned soberly from the window.

"I like you, boy. Listen. I sank all my money into that old ship because all my life I have sworn I will never become that most despised of all sailors, a captain without a ship. I got cheated badly."

He waved his hands vaguely toward the lamp swaying in the first gusts of the fevered night breeze.

"It doesn't matter. Cheating, it seems, is a great part of shore life.

There are mortgages and— The ship comes first with me. I will build up a trade with her, Seward, but I must have a good engineer. You work with me and I will not see you drown. If you get no pay for awhile, you have a home and work to do. There is a West Indian mulatto cook aboard who sailed under me in the Cape Horn trade. He feeds good. And when I have something in the clear it will be all right for you, *nien?*"

A subtle change had come over Lucky Harry Seward. He shuffled his feet and twirled the cap in his hand, but a new light warmed his clear gray eyes.

"It's O.K. with me, Captain Schonberg," he muttered huskily.

"*Gut!* I trust you—Chief."

"Thanks. I'll run down and look things over."

"I will introduce you to my Captain Thompson tomorrow."

Seward nodded and strode for the door. With one hand on the knob he hesitated.

"She will sail on Thursday, Captain," he said.

Schonberg looked at him sharply.

"A minute, *mein* friend. You have give me one fine idea. In Beachcombers' Rest they call my one-ship fleet the Down and Out Line, you say, hey? *Gut!* I will change the nameplate in front of my godown. From today on it will read so: 'Captain Adam Schonberg. The Downout Line. China Coast Service!'"

He chuckled loudly, his full red lips pursed in the white of his beard. For an instant Lucky Harry Seward stared at him. Then he closed the door abruptly. Old Schonberg turned again toward the window, his back to the door just as Seward had first found him, and stared wistfully out at the blackening waters of Singapore Roads. The moon was just edging above the dark top of Pulu Brangat, casting a shimmering track of deep orange upon the harbor across which swam a solitary blunt nosed prau, rolling heavily. Adam

Schonberg tapped his right leg with the tip of his cane, and the sound of wood on wood was like the solemn ticking of a clock.

"Young ass!" he mumbled in his beard. "But he, too, needs a ship—damned bad."



BROKEN and discarded by the sea he had served for an entire lifetime, old Schonberg had wound up in Singapore at an age when most men, if alive, are fit only to bask in the sunlight. He had faced life bravely, and even the legal fraud of a greedy commercial world—a greed he had learned to associate with shoreside life—had failed to embitter his simple soul. But down-and-out Schonberg was as good as his word. There was enough work to be done on the sadly neglected engines and boilers of the poor old *Lorna* to keep a shipyard busy for a week, to say nothing of a short handed, surly, inexperienced Chinese engine room crew.

Lucky Harry Seward did not ponder on the strangeness or the abruptness of his new berth on that first night when he poked about the ghost-like cavern of the still engine room and stoke hole. If it was work he wanted to sweat the despair out of his brain, he had found it a-plenty. After his initial inspection he stopped on the top gratings for a moment, sniffing eagerly the strong, characteristic odors of oil and settling coal dust—odors he had not known for almost a year.

As he climbed for the deck and moved toward the gangway he emitted a soft, enigmatic grunt. He reflected that it was something brave for an old man, broken and swindled of his life's efforts at sixty-five, to set calmly about laying the foundations of a shipping line and a fortune at seventy. A quiet sort of bravery. And he, Lucky Harry Seward? The youngest chief in the Marlson Line! Because a yellow cur with a sodden brain like Crowley . . .

Seward shuddered, but as he picked

his way along the cluttered wharf, weird in the pallid moonlight, he squared his shoulders; and when he reached the gloom of Anson Road he walked quickly toward Beachcombers' Rest to collect his few belongings, his arms swinging at his sides.

Early the next morning he was on board the *Lorna*. He had six coolies and a Eurasian assistant engineer with whom to work the ship. On deck, Captain Thompson, a soft voiced, quiet mannered seaman with gray hair and solemn eyes, was not much better off. The *Lorna* carried only one mate, a youngster barely out of his teens, but a Malay serang stood the master's watch, off soundings and in fine weather. With this complement the newly named Downout Line challenged the world for the China Coast trade!

Promptly at nine o'clock Captain Adam Schonberg came down into the fire room. He stopped at the foot of the ladder, his Malacca cane braced on the floor plates, both blue veined hands resting on the gold knob. He wore a long coat of the vintage known as Prince Albert over a snow white waistcoat, and with his gray beard glistening in the strange light of the stoke hole, he had the appearance of a specter come to survey the sweating toil of mortal men. Seward came crawling out of a fire box, heels first, grime covered and dripping sweat, and at sight of him the old man's blue eyes took to twinkling furiously.

"You are wasting little time, *mein* friend, hey?" he rumbled in his deep bass.

Seward mopped his face with a sweat rag.

"There's none to spare," he panted.

"You have found very much the matter?"

Seward shot him a sharp glance, then involuntarily grinned.

"There isn't much that isn't the matter. But I'll take a stab at it. Found enough new tubes lying around to make a patch-up job on the boilers. Fix her anyway so she'll hold a few pounds of

steam. Both boilers got to be scraped. Hooghlan, my assistant, is lifting the L. P. cylinder head—if the rusty old chain gear don't part on him! She leaks steam from every gland. A job on the condenser and we're ready for sea—as ready as I can make her. Start loading your cargo, sir. We sail on Thursday."

The wrinkles of Schonberg's leathery face deepened.

"Other than that, I have a first rate ship, *nein*?"

He held out his cane. Seward took it and, while he peeled off his long frock coat, Schonberg kept on talking.

"I have seen Captain Thompson. He says he fancies you. That is *gut*. Henri, my cook, he likes you too, because you do justice to his flapjacks and cracker hash slumgullion. Now, if you give me a chipping hammer, I find a pair of overalls and I crawl into the boiler through the manhole and do some rust scaling for you."

Seward stared at him, dumfounded.

"You?" he exploded.

"Ja, me. Why not? I use my wooden leg for a brace inside there and I think I am as good as a yellow coolie. No? Stop staring. I have only three hours to give you. Later I must go up-town to see if I can not convince that old rascal Passo Janari to trust the *Lorna* to take up his cargo to Swatow. He feeds the P & O. It will fill half a hold for us—" he broke off impatiently. "Show me which boiler I work on first!"

So the amazing old man crawled through the manhole and Seward went back to his own work, slowly shaking his head. At noon old Schonberg washed up, donned again his dignified Prince Albert, repossessed himself of his Malacca cane and marched gingerly up the wharf in the blazing sunlight to rustle cargo for the Downton Line.



THURSDAY the *Lorna* sailed.

With the lines singled up, with Captain Thompson on the narrow little bridge, Lucky Harry Seward stood on deck by the engine

room skylight, listening intently to the wheeze of his three-legger turning over. It was something to take a broken down heap like that, and five days later to hear her thumping methodically—if asthmatically! The narrow channel was thick with native craft darting on the shimmering water. Seward looked toward the quay, flooded in sunlight. Captain Schonberg stood at the last stern line, his cane discarded, one hand resting on the dolphin. From the bridge wing Captain Thompson shouted down to him—

"Let go!"

The old man lifted the hawser and let it slide like a monstrous snake into the water, then ran spryly forward, despite his limp, to the headline. The engine room telegraph jangled and Seward looked again at the old sailing ship master who refused to be beaten by life. He saw him for only an instant, bare-headed in the tropical glare, with his snow-white beard in the breeze. He waved his hand at the ship—a stoop shouldered figure with the tails of his Prince Albert fluttering about his legs. Lucky Harry waved once in response, then dived quickly for the ladders leading below to his precious charge. He heard old Schonberg's resonant bass shouting a last farewell and godspeed.

The *Lorna's* hull trembled violently as she fought for sternway. The telegraph called for full ahead. Harry Seward watched his half naked assistant reverse the engine. The links clanged and rattled. Slowly the old ship made headway into the Singapore Strait. Seward's jaw squared as he marched toward the fire room door. A queer light of exultation came to his eyes as he felt once again the throb of a vessel's hull beneath his feet and the lift and surge of her as her bows felt for the first time the heaving combers of the open sea.

The month that followed favored the fortunes of the Downton Line. Each voyage saw the *Lorna* dipping into the offshore swells with her rusted hull deeper in the water toward her faded

Plimsoll mark as Captain Adam Schonberg's cargo-rustling efforts bore fruit. She became a familiar figure in the roadsteads of Batavia, Sarawak and the South China coast.

Lucky Harry Seward nursed his crumby old three-legger like a doting mother. The second trip, foregoing back pay, he asked that his boilers be retubed instead. Old Schonberg looked up at him from his chair in the tumbledown office in his sly, child-like way, and after a momentary silence he simply nodded his head.

Seward was proud as a cock of those newly tubed boilers! The *Lorna* gratefully gave him three extra knots an hour.

Changes there were. The engine room took on a clean, bright appearance. Paint gleamed on the bulkheads. She no longer hissed steam from every gland. But the subtlest change took place, unnoticed by any but Captain Schonberg perhaps, in the chief engineer himself. The look of a hunted beast was gone from Seward's level gray eyes. He walked with a firm tread on the worn, iron decks of his ship; and flabby fat and soft muscles hardened into six feet of lean, efficient manhood.



THE *Lorna* lay at her berth in Swatow, a half hour before sailing for Singapore and the godown dock of the Downout Line. Hooghlan, the assistant, had quit on sailing day, lured by the Oriental charms of a Swatow tea-house girl, and Seward had superintended warming up the engine himself. He had a strong feeling of conquest and accomplishment, for the sound of the three-legger was like the purring of a contented cat to him.

The *Lorna* strained now at her singled up lines, waiting for the new assistant Schonberg was sending along. The old sailing ship master had come north in the ship on the track of a cargo contract, but she was sailing for home without him. He could afford to use the

mail packets now. Lathering his arms in his room, Seward thought of this and grinned broadly at himself in the mirror above his washstand.

A shadow darkened the alleyway, and a moment later the screen door was pushed aside without a knock. A dry, harsh voice asked abruptly—

"You the chief o' this hooker?"

Seward looked up at the mirror. His hand, arrested in the act of reaching toward the towel rack, hung poised in midair. He stood frozen in a half crouched attitude over the basin. The mirrored face split wide suddenly in a spacious grin.

"Well, I'll be damned. If it ain't Lucky Seward, the youngest chief in the Marlson Line! Where's all the gold braid, Harry?"

Seward came erect deliberately, dried his hands and arms without pulling the towel from the rack, then he turned slowly about. His face had paled a shade; his eyes had narrowed.

"What are you doing here, Crowley?"

"Makin' my fortune. Are *you* chief o' this tub o' filth?"

"Yes, I'm chief of her."

Crowley, who had leaned his skinny frame insolently against the bulkhead, slapped his thigh and burst again into a cackling laugh. He was thin almost to emaciation, all the flesh of his body seeming to have centered in his pudgy face, which was round and slack. His eyes, even in mirth, had a queer, vacant stare, and the corners of his thin lips, twitching spasmodically, kept his features in continuous agitation. At length he controlled his mirth with great effort.

"Well, if that ain't nice. I'm damned glad to be sailing with you again, Harry."

"Sailing with—"

"Sure! I'm the new assistant. Down-and-out Schonberg plucked me up from the veranda of the Merchant Officers' Club and sent me down to sail with you. The damned old buzzard! Told me the chief was an old friend of mine, but I never thought—"

"He told you that?" Seward asked quietly.

"Yeah. What you been tellin' the old fool? Said if a man had a friend or an enemy the best place for the both of 'em was on the same ship. I agreed with him." Crowley grinned. "We are old friends, ain't we, Harry?"

Seward took a single step forward, fists clenched at his sides.

"Listen, you! If—"

The harsh jangle of the engine room telegraph cut him short. He relaxed swiftly and pushed his way through the open doorway. In the alleyway he turned.

"I'll take her out. You can come below when you're ready and I'll show you around the job."

"You wouldn't trust me to take her out, would you? That's what you mean, don't you, Harry?"

Crowley's harsh, dry laughter pursued him down the ladders of the engine room. A moment later the bells clanged again. The chief of the *Lorna* answered the telegraph mechanically. The engine started its *thump-thump*. From the fire room the shrill voice of the Chinese No. 1 boy could be heard hurling imprecations on his watchmate. Shovels scraped the floor plates; coal clattered down the chute; but Lucky Harry Seward moved like a man in a trance.

When the final full ahead bell rang he turned to the log desk, propped his elbows on the worn wood and stared blankly at the shaded lamp swaying gently over his head to the ship's motion. He stood there without stirring for a long time, dimly conscious that behind him the yellow oiler he had trained himself was making his silent rounds, a grimy towel wrapped about his skull, oil can in his hands. The chief turned only when Crowley swayed to the floor plates beside him.

"Here I am, chief. Understand we stand watch an' watch on the old tub."

"Yes, we stand watch and watch." Seward turned suddenly. "Listen, Crow-

ley," he bit off savagely. "We're at sea now. This is my engine room. You wouldn't understand, but this ship and this job means a lot to me. I'm telling you this, though: If we weren't at sea I'd beat you to a pulp. Do you understand? To a pulp! You damned me to hell in the *Oriole* inquiry and—"

He stood fully erect, tense, the muscles of his neck and face bulging with his effort at control. Crowley continued to smirk slyly, and slowly the fierce anger drained from Seward's face.

"We'll forget all that this voyage," he went on in a strangely quiet voice. "When we tie up in S'pore— You can't sail with me, Crowley."

Crowley tugged at the sagging fold of his cheek.

"I can't, hey?" Seward turned aside, but the other's skinny hand shot out and clutched his arm, whirling him about again. "You can't high hat me, Harry Seward, an' don't you ever forget it! There's too much red on the back of your ticket! Listen," he said softly. "I wanna talk to you."

"Yes?"

Seward looked at him, bitter eyed. Crowley lurched closer, assuming an expression of sly cunning. The polished steel piston rods of the *Lorna's* main engine, flashing upward and downward, flung glistening beams of light and shadow on his perspiring face.

"You an' me, Harry, are a lot in the same boat." He grinned, his voice little more than a whisper.

Seward kept staring at him like a man fascinated by some cruelly dangerous creature.

"In the same boat," Crowley repeated, "in a lot o' ways. See? You're down an' out wi' a cracked ticket. You couldn't get a decent job anywhere. Nothin' but this sort o' a crumby China Coaster that's half ship an' half coal barge ploughin' to the stinkin' holes o' tropic ports. Me, I'm down on my luck a bit, too. But my brain's still workin' fine. See?"

"What are you driving at, you—?"

Crowley leaned forward, poking a finger at the chief's chest as he winked a heavy lid, the corners of his mouth twitching.

"Suppose—just suppose, see?—that there was a heap o' gold to be had for the takin', Harry. Just by reachin' out for it—like that!" His left hand shot out and his fist closed in a swift gesture; then opened again as the fingers spread wide. "Easy, Harry. Enough to settle you for the rest of your life an' be damned wi' ships an' stinkin' sweat! Just the thing for me—an' you. What would you say if I could put you in the way of something like that, hey? You wouldn't be so uppish, would you?" His lips drew back on yellow stained teeth. "You can't afford to pass up something like this now, Harry. See?"

Seward's brow furrowed deeply. The man must be mad. He was an impossible, haunting specter, with his twitching lips and his vacant, staring eyes.

"Gold? Crowley, you're off your head. I'll show you the job. There's a leaky pump needs packing. Come along."

The other's arm shot out again and fastened on Seward's shoulder.

"Gold, I said!" He whispered impatiently in the chief's ear. "You know damned well what I mean! You don't suppose I took a stinkin' job like this for my health, do you? To hell wi' the o'l hooker. I can handle a teapot job like this without bein' shown where every valve an' auxiliary's wheezin'. Are you with me—or not? You can't afford to be so damned choosy now, Harry. A filthy singlet's different from four gold stripes on a uniform sleeve. See?"

Seward whirled furiously on him.

"You can go plumb to hell, Crowley! Is that plain? And the first damned nonsense you start, so help me, I'll smash you! Understand? Now get out of this engine room. I'll have you called when the watch changes. Get out, I said!"

Crowley shot him a look full of un-suppressed hatred, but before he turned for the ladder leading to the deck his

face was wrinkled again in its evil grin. Seward watched him stonily until his legs disappeared on the upper gratings. But he could not drive the leering face from his mind. All the watch his brain kept spinning dizzily. The catastrophe of the *Oriole*—almost two years distant now—reenacted itself, and again and again, to the throbbing rhythm of the *Lorna's* main engine, he heard the growl of Crowley's "Gold!"



WHEN eight bells were struck on the long bar Crowley came lurching confidently into the heat ridden engine room, his eyes darting from side to side with unnatural brightness. Seward marched swiftly with him about the little engine room, explaining in short, clipped phrases the peculiarities of the *Lorna's* ancient installations. At the log desk he faced his assistant.

"Swell job, Chief," Crowley mocked.

"This speaking tube leads to my room." Seward ignored the other completely. "Call me if you need me. Watch those coolies. There're only three in a watch. They alternate striking down coal from the bunker and firing. The yellow oiler's all right, but watch the steam closely. Keep at 'em. You tend your own water. Is that plain, Mr. Crowley?"

"Plain as day. I'll take care of the water."

"Good night."

Seward climbed the ladders, deep in thought. Slowly he went to his room, washed up, pulled on his patrol jacket and crossed the vessel's waist to the saloon for supper.

The serang kept the bridge. Young Howard, the mate, nodded as the chief entered and took his seat, continuing at once his silent attack on a plate of curry and rice and Bombay chutney. The master, at the head of the little table, acknowledged his greeting quietly.

"Your new assistant got aboard all right, eh, Chief?"

"Aye, he got aboard," Seward replied

abstractedly. "Captain Schonberg sent him right down to us from the Swatow Club."

The meal progressed in silence until the mate, excusing himself, rose to relieve the bridge. Henri, the mulatto West Indian who served as cook and messboy, disappeared silently into the pantry with mugs and dishes. The ship lurched uneasily to the monsoon-swept combers of the China Sea.

"Captain Thompson," Seward said softly, leaning thoughtfully forward on the table, "has old Schonberg got a shipment of gold going down with us this trip?"

The master looked up quickly, his clean shaven, wrinkled face settling in to a swift frown.

"Gold, Chief? Why, whatever gave you that idea?"

"Crowley, the new assistant—" Seward answered after a short silence. "I'm not nosy. I—I just don't like him aboard."

The captain asked quietly—

"Why'd you ship him?"

"I didn't," the chief said. "Schonberg sent him down ten minutes before we shoved off. And he knew who he was, too. He—"

"Well, who is he?"

Seward shrugged.

"He sailed with me before I—before I came out East."

"Oh, I see," Captain Thompson breathed softly. "Yes, I see."

There was a long silence. Dusk crept into the little cabin. The sound of creaking timbers and the loud wash of the sea grew more distinct. The two men stood up at length, moving toward the doorway. Before lifting his foot over the weather board, Captain Thompson hesitated.

"If you are expecting trouble," he said simply without turning his head, "you can depend on me."

Then he disappeared immediately toward the bridge ladder. Seward marched to the rail, thoughtfully charging his pipe.



THE *Lorna* wallowed steadily southward through the turquoise swells of the China Sea.

On the seventh day out of Swatow the monsoon died completely, and a faint following breeze lifted the haze of smoke from her stack straight up into the fevered air. The sun blazed pitilessly on the long, oily undulations through which the ship ploughed despairingly. The atmosphere was thick and clammy, maddening, and there was no comfort to be found anywhere on board.

Seward, restless and uneasy, had kept continually alert. Off watch, tossing in his bunk, every unexpected sound from the engine room sent him tumbling to the deck. The strain of it showed in his hollowed eyes and drawn features. A vague, intangible tenseness hovered over the ship, and the chief lived like a man in the shadow of a steaming volcano.

There was something uncanny in the way the coolie firemen looked at him, as though he were a doomed man and they alone knew the exact hour of his death. Crowley himself had apparently entirely forgotten his subtle suggestions. He spoke but rarely, except to his Chinese crew, but his strangely vacant eyes lighted with unmistakable triumph at every sight of Seward. Off watch, the assistant spent his time haranguing the yellow men about the forecastle doors, and there was no doubt in Seward's mind that Crowley and the coolie crew of the *Lorna* had a friendly and diabolic understanding . . . There was nothing to do but wait.

And north of the Paracel Reef, to windward of Hainan Island, the explosion burst with a violence that took even Lucky Harry Seward completely by surprise.

It was Crowley's morning watch. The chief, haggard and spent from his long, lone vigil, had dropped off into an exhausted doze in the darkness of his sweltering room. How long he slept he did not know, nor exactly what awak-

ened him. But he came upright suddenly in his bunk. The cabin was a sickly gray in the early light before dawn, and for a moment he sat listening intently.

The *Lorna's* engines thumped rhythmically with no unusual sound. Water slapped loudly against her moving hull, and the faint night breeze moaned dismally through her shrouds. It was perhaps only his highly strained nerves, but the ship's wallowing seemed to him to have a lifelessness to it, as though she were utterly weary of lifting her aged body over the long, oily swells. She rolled heavily from side to side, sluggishly, steadily.

Seward heard then the patter of naked feet from the vessel's waist, and he came quickly to the deck, scrambling into his trousers. A boat block creaked, and the next instant he heard a muffled yell from the bridge, followed immediately by the report of a pistol and the echo that followed. He darted forward, tore open the screen door and leaped into the alleyway. That alone saved him from being murdered where he lay.

"Chief! Look out!" It was the voice of Henri, Schonberg's mulatto cook, bellowing lustily from the well deck. "Dey're after you!"

Over his shoulder Seward saw two yellow shapes springing toward him, bare knives glittering—the coolie oiler of his own watch and Crowley's No. 1 boy. He hesitated for only a moment, then leaped in one spring for the deck.

In the strange light before the dawn he saw one of the *Lorna's* boats swinging free in the davits. A black shape sagged inertly in a corner of the bridge wing. Crowley himself came backing out of the master's cabin under the bridge, a smoking pistol in his hand, a small chest under his other arm. The coolies were diving helter-skelter into the swaying boat, shrieking gibberish.

For an instant Seward felt a strange wave of exultation sweep over him. He had no time to analyze what had happened or was happening. But here, at

least, was something tangible, something to be met forcibly and actively. Anything was better than the nerve wracking waiting. Crowley turned at the top of the ladder, spied him and leaped aside. Seward sprang forward. Out of the corner of his eye he had a fleeting vision of the flying shape of the big, black cook racing across the deck to his aid. Behind him, a moment later, he heard the West Indian grapple his pursuers, heard the grunt and thud of struggling men.

All this passed with lightning speed through his now lucid consciousness. Clearly, he knew only one thing: Somehow he must reach the skinny figure of Crowley before he could get away. He came up swiftly to the topmost rung of the bridge ladder and, without hesitation, hurled himself bodily through the air. The impact sent Crowley crashing backward, but he found his balance, sidestepped hastily and brought up his arm. Seward heard a harsh, dry laugh, a shuffle of feet behind him, and the next instant, even as he half turned, a sharp stab of pain at the base of the skull sent him reeling drunkenly.

He reached out blindly, struggling desperately to clear his brain, but the next moment a black pall blotted all consciousness from him . . .



SEWARD came to his senses in semi-darkness, slowly at first, then lurching suddenly to his knees as the realization of what had happened surged over him. His skull throbbed with a fierce, dull ache, and he shook his head grimly to shake free the last tatters of coma. He found himself in the *Lorna's* machine shop with the iron door leading into the engine room closed. Staggering to his feet, he tried it. The bolt had been shot home from the outside.

He listened intently. The ship's main engine had been stopped, and he heard only the characteristic shuffling noise of the auxiliaries. The vessel lurched drunkenly from side to side, rising sod-

denly to the swells of the China Sea and falling heavily on her counter with a loud hissing of water.

He cursed bitterly under his breath, then spun on his heel at the sound of a muffled groan. It was not until then that he became aware of the fact that Henri had been carried with him into their prison. The big black moaned again as Seward dropped to his knee at his side. That he had put up a terrific struggle was evidenced by the awful battering he had received. A stream of blood had run down the side of his head, coagulating there, and his singlet hung in ragged strips from his bruised shoulders.

"Easy, Henri. Easy does it," Seward soothed grimly as the big black, his mind still intent on the recent battle, fought wildly to a sitting posture.

He wagged his head, his eyeballs rolling in the jet mask of his face.

"Chief, dat you? Gawd, is you all right?"

"All right, Henri. Can you make it now? We got to break out of here—damned soon! Lend a hand here if you can."

Seward found topping maul and cold chisel. These he dragged toward the door, and together the pair attacked the heavy hinges, the blows of iron on iron resounding in the enclosed space with deafening reverberations. The fastenings gave way at length and the pair staggered into the engine room. For an instant Seward stood stock still on the lower grating. In spite of the steady shuffling of pumps, the still, desolate air of desertion hung upon the settling ship. Except for the fact that the main engine was still, however, everything seemed normal; but the *Lorna*, no longer rising to the swells, butted her nose through the seas, settling back on her haunches each time with an ominous sound of washing water.

Seward sprang for the ladder, a hoarse cry of anger on his lips as the truth struck him with sudden forcefulness and he took in the details of the abandon-

ment. The shaft alley and fire room water-tight doors stood open. Oily, grime laden water washed above the bilge plates.

"Close the alley door, Henri! Quick!" he cried. "Damn him, he's scuttling the *Lorna*!" And without waiting for his order to be obeyed, he raced for the bulkheads, the negro banging the door closed, jamming the swing bolts into place and then shuffling excitedly after the chief.

It was as Seward expected. The main sea and bilge injection valves were opened full. Henri watched him with wide, staring eyes as the chief manipulated valves, then stopped, listening intently. Except for himself and the big black the engine room was deserted. There was no doubt left now of what had happened.

Slowly, carefully, Crowley had gone about his mutinous campaign, urging the small coolie crew on by wild promises of gold and wealth untold. Whether any one else remained alive aboard the ship Seward could not know. One thing was certain: Crowley, abandoning ship, had left them to drown like trapped rats as the *Lorna* took with her to the depths of the sea all the evidence of his murderous mutiny.

"Come on, Henri," Seward breathed softly between tightly clenched teeth; he led the way up the iron ladders to the deck.

In the alleyway he stopped short and turned to the negro.

"You keep down out of sight. On your hands and knees. Keep under the shelter of the bulwark. Make for the bridge ladder. See what's become of Captain Thompson up there. I'll handle the rest of 'em. Lively now! If there's any one alive up there, keep them out of sight."

Henri nodded dumbly and dropped to all fours, crawling quickly across the vessel's waist. Seward himself stepped upright into the open and walked to the rail. A strange sight met his eyes under the dazzling light of the sun.

On the port beam, some three miles off, the low, jungled land of Hainan Island stretched like a black line across the brilliant horizon. Less than a hundred yards from the ship, resting on their oars, the mutinous yellow crew of the *Lorna* bobbed up and down in their boat, the only living speck on the whole vast expanse of shimmering sea. One figure, tall and thin like a pencil against the sky, stood upright in the stern-sheets, one hand shielding his eyes against the glare of the rising sun as he waited for the ship to take her last long dive. At sight of Seward coming to the rail in plain view he seemed to start in alarm. The chief stared across the water, then cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted bitterly:

"You fool! You damned fool!"

A dry cackle answered him, but the oars dipped, flashing beams of reflected sunlight, and the boat drew closer to the wallowing ship. When the small craft was no more than a hundred feet from the *Lorna's* side, Crowley deliberately lifted his right arm and the pistol he held spat a streak of flame. The report echoed like a clap of thunder, but his aim was poor in the lurch of the craft, and the ball whined harmlessly over Seward's head. Crowley then lifted his bloated face.

"Hello, Harry!" he mocked. "Lucky Harry Seward! I got the gold an' he's got the ship. I remember you told me the ship meant a hell of a lot to you. A swift passage to you, Harry!"

"Yes, you fool!" Seward called in desperation. "You got the gold and I've got the ship. And what will you tell 'em when I bring her into S'pore and they start looking for you for—?"

"Bring her into Singapore?" Crowley bellowed insane laughter. "Bring her into hell, you mean! She's sinkin' under your feet!"

"Not while I'm aboard, she won't. I can turn a valve closed as easy as you can turn it open. Do you hear?"

Crowley's face turned a pasty white. Two things had gone awry in his plans.

He had never thought Seward would so soon discover his simple act. And he had not counted on Seward's returning to consciousness until it was too late, if at all, for that matter. He raised his arm again, extending the pistol, his mouth working furiously, for Seward must at all costs be silenced now.

"Stop it, you fool! Listen to me," Seward roared. "You've got the gold and I've got the ship. Which is worth more, do you think? You keep the gold and I'll bring the ship into some hole in the land on the Tonkin Gulf and sell her for a salvage. Who'll make more, do you think? Hey, you rotten double-crosser? Think that over!"

Seward waited after that desperate chance. Crowley looked up at him and slowly his face twisted into a crafty leer.

"You mean you've come to your senses, Harry?" he shouted across the narrow stretch of water.

"What else? Sure I've come to my senses!"



THE figure in the small boat sat down abruptly, talking swiftly and eagerly to his boat's crew of grimy, half naked Chinamen. Seward heard their guttural, unintelligible comment, then their swift jabber of sing-song Cantonese as they debated his proposal among themselves. Crowley was desperate. Seward must be silenced—thoroughly and completely. At length he stood up in the stern sheets.

"Throw over the ladder, Harry," He grinned in an attempt at pleasantness. "We'll come aboard an' do this thing right—together. What do you say?"

"Come on!"

Seward flung the rope ladder over the iron bulwark. The yellow backs bent over the oars and the small boat shot against the rusted sides of the *Lorna*, momentarily out of the chief's range of vision. He did not lean over the bulwark, but he saw the ladder take hold as a weight leaped upon it. Seward braced

himself for battle, muscles taut and tense as set steel springs.

Crowley's head came over the rail, grinning amiably. The next moment he sprang quickly to the deck and the grin left his face.

"You stinkin' fool!" he shrieked. "You think I'm idiot enough to take a chance bringin' this tub into a port? Ha! You know too damned much!"

His right hand darted upward, the pistol spitting. The first ball stung Seward in the shoulder, but the second ricocheted with a high whistle from the iron bulkhead. The chief had launched himself at Crowley's skinny form.

Even before their bodies crashed together to the iron deck Seward heard the excited jabbering of the coolies in the long boat, and he sensed instinctively that the instant Crowley had left the small craft, leaving his small, precious chest on the sternsheets, they had shoved off from the vessel's side and were now rowing furiously for the land. They had had enough of this leader to whom they owed no allegiance other than the bond of greed. The gold alone was what they were after, and with a direct simplicity of logic they could see no reason for sharing such lavish wealth with a renegade white man.

In the moment that Seward closed with Crowley his right hand shot like a vise upon the wrist that held the pistol. Before the astonished assistant could regain his balance or recover from his surprise at the sudden, unexpected attack, Seward brought the wrist down savagely upon his upraising knee, and the weapon clattered to the deck as a howl of pain came from Crowley's lips. He cursed obscenely and twisted free.

He had no stomach for a fair fight. He crouched, his arms weaving half bent at his sides. Seward closed instantly, both fists working. The blows landed with dull, hammer-like thuds. Crowley winced, staggering backward under the withering attack, his cracked, bleeding lips drawn back on bared teeth. Head down, he butted madly forward, arms

reaching blindly. One hand closed on the chief's throat and hung there, the other searching wildly for a hold where fingers and thumbs could get in their pitiless work.

Seward unloosed a savage uppercut under the other's arm, catching Crowley on the point of the chin and snapping his head violently backward. But his hold still held. They were too close now for Seward's fists to be of any use. The talons about his throat fastened deeper and one thumb pressed his temple, searching for the chief's eye.

Seward wrenched his body backward and at the same time closed both arms about Crowley's body. Lifting him clear of the deck, he swayed for an instant with his squirming burden, and then, calling up every ounce of reserve strength, he straightened his forearms suddenly and sent Crowley, his hold torn loose, flying bodily against the hatch coaming. He came down on the flat of his back. As he fell, his head struck the sharp edge of the steam pipe grating with a sickening sound.

Seward straightened up, looking down at the assistant, but Crowley did not move. Unconscious of the steady stream of blood that stained his shoulder, the chief wheeled for the rail. The *Lorna's* small boat with her crew of mutinous Chinamen was a black dot on the brilliant dazzle of sea that separated the ship from the low lying land of Hainan Island.

"Good God, they got the gold!" Seward panted.

"Mr. Seward!"

The chief turned, looked up, and saw the swaying form of Captain Thompson at the head of the bridge ladder. Behind him the Malay serang was gesticulating excitedly at Henri, the black cook.

"Send some one down here to look after this rat," Seward called hoarsely. He started to climb the bridge ladder.

"From the looks of him he won't need very much looking after any more, Chief. In God's name—"

"Get the other boat away, sir," Seward implored, flinging his good hand in the direction of the disappearing Chinese. "They—they've made off with the gold."

"Steady, man!" the master muttered, and led the way to his cabin under the bridge.

The safe gaped open. Captain Thompson walked to his bunk, drew aside the curtains and pulled down the top blanket.

"They haven't got away with anything but a small chest full of bolts and nuts, Chief. The night you asked me whether Schonberg had a shipment of gold going down I got worried. I don't deny, Mr. Seward, that I was a bit afraid you were after it yourself. It's been in my bunk ever since. I can't say I fancy Schonberg's sending stuff like that on a ship—on a ship like this."

Seward stared at him, swaying unsteadily in the center of the cabin. The blankets of the master's bed revealed four small canvas sacks, knotted and tied with marline.

"You thought I—?"

"Yes. I'm sorry. Crowley came up here just before eight bells," the master went on quietly, explaining what had happened. "He very evidently had the ship's whole yellow complement in with him. The serang and Mr. Howard were on the bridge. Poor Howard got a lead ball through the skull when he showed fight. He's finished, I'm afraid. The coolies set on the serang and myself. Forced me to open the safe, then lashed us up and locked us in the cabin. That's all I know until Henri came up here just now and managed to batter down the door. I came on deck in time to see you finish that—that—"

"Can you bring the ship into S'pore?" the chief interrupted quietly.

"There is myself and the serang up here. I can bring her in if you can turn the engines over."

"I'll stand by below for bells, Captain," Seward said simply.

"Who the devil's going to fire your

boilers?" the captain asked.

"Me and Henri!"

The master looked at him sharply. Then he nodded.

"When you get things running smoothly below," he growled, "come up here, Mr. Seward, and I'll dress that wound in your shoulder."

Fifteen minutes later the *Lorna's* engine was turning over and the ship, wallowing gracelessly back on her course, took up her rolling progress southward through the swells of the South China Sea toward Singapore. In the fire room Henri, the big West Indian, naked to the waist, bellowed exultant gibberish as he struck down coal, kicked open a lower fire door and hurled shovelful after shovelful into the glowing maw that sent streaks of firelight dancing on his wet torso.

The pumps slowly but steadily emptied the ship of water.



WHEN the *Lorna* limped through the Singapore Strait and up to her berth at the godown dock of the Downout Line, old Adam Schonberg stood waiting for her, the coat of his Prince Albert unbuttoned, his snowy beard in the breeze, his Malacca cane tapping his wooden leg, and a sly twinkle in his puckered eyes. He frowned when the ship edged at dead slow toward the wharf, for he saw no one on the fore-castle head but the cook, a white, grimy bandage about his head, his immense shoulders black against the skyline as he braced himself to fling the heaving line.

Schonberg's eyes darted aft just in time to see the Malay serang slack away the stern line as the shore gang made fast to the dolphin.

"Where the devil is your crew?" he hailed. "Have you had sickness on board?"

"We've had worse than sickness!" Captain Thompson answered from the bridge wing just before he ran back toward the telegraph and into the little pilot house to put the wheel amidships.

Old Schonberg waited patiently until the narrow plank came over the side. Then he marched quickly aboard, his briefcase in one hand, his cane in the other. In the master's cabin he waited until Captain Thompson entered.

"Well?" he asked at last, his eyes sparkling brightly. "How did Crowley like it under our chief, and what's all this about?"

"Crowley's down where the white sea-snakes live, Captain Schonberg," the master cut in shortly. He cracked his skull. We heaved him over the side to windward of Hainan Island at the mouth of the Tonkin Gulf. Sit down, sir."

Schonberg's lips pursed and his eyes widened as he sat down abruptly, listening without comment to the master's tale of the voyage. Lucky Harry Seward pushed open the door and marched in just as the account was ended.

"Well, we brought her home!" he announced triumphantly. "Four men—" He stopped short at sight of old Schonberg.

The aged sailing ship master stood up. The twinkle was gone completely from his eyes as he seriously faced his chief engineer.

"Seward," he said soberly, "I did not mean for things to turn out this way. When I sent Crowley down to you in Swatow it was only because—well, because you are a headstrong man, Harry, and think too much about that—about the *Oriole*. I thought if the two of you were together on one ship you would find yourself again and the truth would come out at last, so—"

"It did, Captain Schonberg," Seward interposed grimly.

Old Schonberg looked from one to the other in silence. Then the bright glow returned to his old eyes and he thoughtfully combed his beard.

"But in the end it has come all right, *nein*? And what you two have done makes better what news I have for you. You, Seward and Thompson, came and worked with me when the Downout

Line was down and out. Ha! We were all down and out! *Nein*? Now our China Coast service is a fact—and in four, five more months I buy anodder ship. I have my eye on her already. And for all the pay which you two did not get those first months—" He broke off, then finished enigmatically, "Go walk the dock and look at the front of our godown."

The master and the engineer stared at the stoop shouldered old man as though they thought he had gone completely out of his head.

"You t'ink I am *verrückt*—crazy. No?" Schonberg chuckled loudly, combing his beard furiously. Then he turned on Seward. "I have been writing letters here when I have nothing else to do to old Captain Marlson, port superintendent of your old company. He was old friend of mine in the sailing ship days. I talk to him about you, Harry, and I write to him again now and tell him what I have learned of Crowley and of you. I t'ink maybe he gladly give you a ship again." The old fellow's eyes shone under their bushy white brows. "You are a man for a crack passenger liner, Harry, not for a crumby old hooker with a three-legger engine that falls to pieces. *Nein*?"

Seward slowly shook his head.

"I'll stay where I am, Captain Schonberg," he said.



ADAM SCHONBERG spread out his hands, palms upward, and his full red lips widened in a broad grin.

"*Gut!* From what I hear, when we get anodder ship, maybe we make an engineer of my Henri. Hey?"

"No, suh!" The West Indian's voice barked this out with savage vehemence from the post he had taken just outside the door for his eavesdropping. "From dis voyage on I ain't never gonna say a galley stove's hot. No, suh! Yo' makes no engineer out o' dis here nigger cook!"

Schonberg laughed. Even Seward's

grimy face creased in a grin. Captain Thompson stood up wearily.

"At any rate, Schonberg, they didn't make off with any of the gold. But I can't say I fancy shipping stuff like that on the *Lorna*!"

"Gold?" Schonberg exploded violently. "So that is what that Crowley thought I was talking about in Swatow. Why, Captain, there is no gold on board the *Lorna*! At least nothing to kill a man over. Listen. Those t'ree sacks I gave you in Swatow, Captain, to put in your safe, is Chinese coin. I was going to use it to pay off our whole coolie crew here this trip and then send dem home to Hongkong. *Verstehtst*? But since they have mutinied and deserted the vessel we do not have to do even that. No? They have already their pay, hey? Bolts and nuts! That is *gut*, Captain!"

The old man chuckled whole-heartedly, then went on in dead earnestness:

"We are going to ship a white crew instead for the Downout Line, and two mates and two assistant engineers. Any man—but he must be a *man*!—who is down and out can find work and himself on board our ships. Because I remember always when I—when we all were down and out ourselves. No? What you t'ink? Meantime, *mein* friends, you have salvaged a ship and a valuable cargo! Go up to *mein* office, you two; I join you right away. I want to talk first with Henri and dat *serang*."

In a daze the master and the chief came out on deck and, climbing to the wharf, walked slowly toward the en-

trance of Adam Schonberg's godown. Here Seward suddenly touched Captain Thompson's arm and pointed in silence. The tarnished nameplate had been replaced by a new plaque of polished brass, and they read the inscription which it bore:

The Downout Line. China Coast Service. Schonberg, Thompson & Seward, Ltd.

Thompson pushed back the peak of his cap and, without turning his head, asked softly:

"You, Seward, were you in the Marlson Line?"

"Aye, Cap'n. I was chief of the *Oriole*."

"Did you ever hear of young Captain Jerry Thompson? No?" He was still staring fixedly at that amazing nameplate of brass. "Before your time, I guess," he mused on. "Me, I had the *Lanukai*—years, years ago. Before she piled up in the Straits of Fucca."

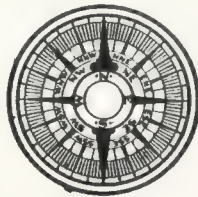
They stared together at the blank wall of the godown, neither one daring to look at the other. At length gray-headed Thompson pulled down his cap firmly and stroked his white temples.

"Old Adam Schonberg—he said we salvaged a ship, Seward, and a valuable cargo."

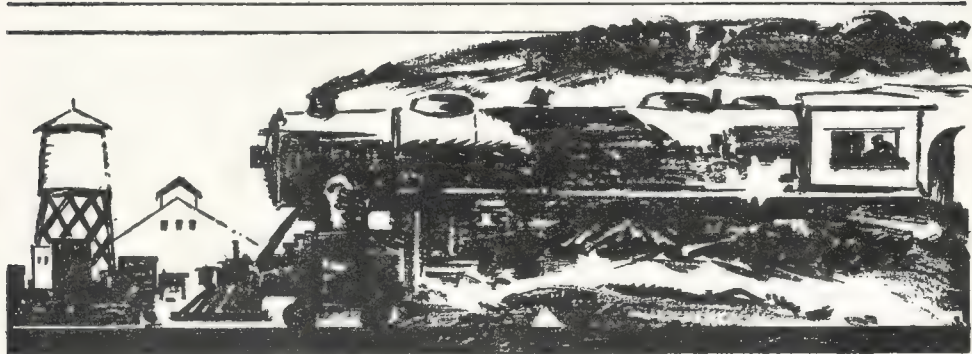
"Aye, Cap'n," Seward growled, "but I guess maybe he did some salvage of his own, too."

Captain Thompson shot the engineer a sharp look.

"Yes," he said at last. "I guess maybe you're right, Harry. I guess maybe he did."



A Story of the Railroad Men



WIDE OPEN

By WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

GILCHRIST, when he told the brakeman to run, knew instinctively that it wasn't according to the rules; but the conductor, now in the telegraph office, had said that the need for hurry was great. And Gilchrist forgot his personal bitterness—forgot he had been demoted from the main line to this branch line mine-job engine. In the moment of tension that charged the atmosphere of the Paxton yard, he forgot that he sat there in the dinky wooden cab of the 717 as the superintendent's example to the main line crews that railroad rules must not be stretched.

His eyes, wide spaced in strong, broad features that somehow seemed to accentuate the power in his width of chest and height of frame, turned swiftly to the passenger platform. A sagging, sweating, red eyed cargo of humanity was belching out from the exits of eighteen steel passenger cars. A high-wheeler snorted away for a hurried turn to get on the other end.

A milling crowd . . .

"Thank God, Joey. You come back—"

A woman screaming. Stretchers being lifted tenderly from the two head cars—the hospital coaches. Doctors and nurses in white, ready for the beaten men who had volunteered to fight fire, some of them turned frantic in the leaping flame and billowing smoke.

Gilchrist saw a woman sighting a scarred form on a stretcher at the platform, heard her shriek and saw her collapse across the twisted body of a half dead man. People closed in about her. The ball of cotton waste in Gilchrist's strong left hand was crushed and hurled to the floor of the engine deck. He looked back along the yard lead switches where his brakeman still ran swiftly, his lantern bobbing up and down in desperate jerks.

The cries of the mob were higher, the last of the haggard hundreds to come back tonight from the Cadiz draw—that crazy crooked pass through the Bitter

Roots on the main line—where the upper world was a rim of hell on earth, and three thousand acres of pine and spruce were bright in the mad glory of a forest fire. That gang had been in there for the past twenty-four hours with pick and shovel and dynamite, fighting to keep the red holocaust confined to the slopes above the right of way.

Even as the running brakeman paused by one of the yard lead switches, a fresh mob was boarding the coaches—eight hundred troops, with fresh doctors and nurses to stand by at the Cadiz tower.

Gilchrist, on the engine of the mine-job off the branch, saw the picture in the passage of fleet seconds. This was a night for speed, for fast action. Within two minutes the passenger engine would be back on the west end of those coaches and Gilchrist would have to have his engine at the rear to push up the grade.

"Let 'er go!"

The cry came from Gilchrist's fireman, who was looking ahead on the lead.

"Highball!" Gilchrist called as he saw the brakeman's lantern, two hundred feet ahead, give the sign to come wide open.

Gilchrist looked back along the six loads tied to his tail—coal loads down from the mines. The lantern of another brakeman, hanging to the stirrup of the car just back of his tender, lifted. Gilchrist's throttle hand clutched the latch; the bar came back. The wheezy engine shot sparks into the smoke haze of the night sky. The exhaust coughed deep in the stack.

As if the leaky mine-job engine knew exactly what task lay ahead of it, the drivers rolled and gathered speed. Gilchrist shot crazily down the lead. His grim eyes never left the lantern at the end of his tender. Now that lantern swung outward—the sign to give the brakeman the slack to get the coupling pin.

Gilchrist shut off for just a measured fraction of a second. The lantern at the back of the tender swung high. Gilchrist jerked his throttle out, and the

engine sailed ahead, leaving its six cars to come hurtling along behind it, free.

The light of the brakeman at the switch flashed under the cab. Gilchrist looked down and back. He saw the switch thrown suddenly, as if under his tender wheels. Then he saw the other brakeman's lantern on the head car of the string, saw the lantern swerve with the motion of the cars as they took the points of the switch and clattered down into the neighboring track.

The move was what is known in railroad signals and operation as a drop. The engine racing to give its trailing cars momentum, then running away from them into one track to allow them to be shunted into another. Lightning speed of mind and muscles enters into the play.

Gilchrist waited only until the cars slid by him; then he reversed and the brakeman who'd thrown the switch signaled a quick back-up. The engine tore back on the lead, entered another switch and rolled to the main track to get behind the waiting coaches.

No sooner had the coupling been made than Johnny Peters, the mine run conductor, came under the cab with his lantern. The head engine, the high-wheeler, whistled twice. Johnny Peters raised his lantern and brought it down. Gilchrist echoed the blast from the passenger engine. A rumble ran through the coaches. Gilchrist opened his throttle and shoved.

Bare arms waved goodbys from the open windows. Wives and mothers and sisters waved back from the platform. The last consignment to hell that night. Gilchrist looked at the swarming platform and quickly looked away. The roar of the twin exhausts shattered the silences of the early night, shook the earth and the squat railroad buildings that rested upon the earth. Under Gilchrist's churning, pounding drivers the main line slid backward, and Gilchrist sat hunched in his seat, a man on forbidden ground.

That was his main line where the fifteen best years of his life were served

and which, by force of circumstance, was now denied him because Superintendent Walsh, a stickler for the book of rules, had decided that Engineman Gilchrist could and would not learn that a rule in the book must not be stretched. And because Gilchrist had stretched a rule now and then in the interests of getting over the railroad, the main line had been taken from him; and the branch line mine-job had been handed him because Walsh had to make an example somewhere. Branch line exile! That's why his eyes burned with the fierce fire of resentment, and his lips had lost their smile.

The distant cough of the lead engine changed in tune. Gilchrist's throttle shot home, and the brakeman on the tender raised and dropped his lantern. The coaches were over the hill.



WITH his engine spotted on the depot spur, Gilchrist shouldered his way into the telegraph office where men with tense faces and tight lips hovered close to the operator. He looked about quickly and caught the cold eyes of Walsh, the division boss. Walsh gave a nod of his head and walked to a deserted corner. Gilchrist went over to him.

"I saw that play, Gilchrist," Walsh said from thin lips. He spoke in a quiet tone without excitement or passion, and yet the words seemed to be whipped out. "I saw you make a drop of those mine cars."

"Yes, sir," Gilchrist said, without flinching. His wide jaw was set.

"I'm sorry you did that, Gilchrist."

"I know. You understand why I did it. The trainmaster told Johnny Peters we had to move fast and get behind those coaches to help 'em over the hill."

"The trainmaster didn't tell you," Mr. Walsh said, "to violate the regulations."

"No, sir."

"What are the time card rules covering switching moves in the Paxton yard?"

"Because," Gilchrist said as if quoting, "of a descending grade eastward, all cars

must be moved and set into tracks with the air brakes connected and used. Drops and flying switches are taboo."

"And knowing that, Gilchrist, you deliberately made a drop of those six cars from the mine."

"It saved five minutes."

"It violated a rigid rule."

"I took no unnecessary chances," Gilchrist returned tersely. "Nor did the men. I didn't consult Conductor Peters, either. He came into the telegraph office after telling me that we didn't have any time to spare. I take the responsibility. I ordered the drop."

"Peters, I know, wouldn't have done it," Walsh snapped. "You, Gilchrist, devoted several years of your engine running on the main line to doing just such things as that. The trainmaster, under my orders, checked up on you."

"I know."

"He caught you."

"Yes, sir."

"Because of your tendencies to railroad out of your own mind and not by the book, Gilchrist, I jerked you from main line service and put you on this Paxton branch mine-job."

"As a horrible example," Gilchrist said with bitterness.

"And as a cure."

"My record," Gilchrist cut in. "Suppose I've stretched rules! Have I ever caused an accident? Have I ever injured an employee, either on my own crew or on another? Have I ever caused a delay?"

"Your record, Gilchrist, may be partly due to bull luck. I'm sorry you made that drop tonight. Sorry for your sake. You've been here fifteen years."

"And so?"

"You'll serve out your time tonight, Gilchrist. Tomorrow you'll be relieved. You'll go back to Cresson, your home terminal, and I'll send for you at my convenience. You're through, Gilchrist."

The superintendent turned away, his hands clasped behind his back. He'd been a colonel in the Army during the war. He acted the general now—the

king. Gilchrist made a step as if to overtake him, then stopped and looked at his great hands. His fingers clenched into fists. The muscles at his jaws bulged grimly.

Slowly he turned and walked out to the platform. The wave of bitterness that coursed through him shook his great frame while the vision of all those things that he had done in the name of railroading as he knew it rushed through his mind. If he had ever really done anything glaring he would have no cause to feel badly. His rule infractions, such as they had been—his stretching a point now and then—had always served to help him do his job well. He was one of those enviable engineers for whom conductors fight to the last ditch. Conductors had always been glad to have Gilchrist behind the smoke; they knew that Gilchrist would get them there.

Johnny Peters, who was an outstanding example, touched Gilchrist's sleeve.

"Maybe he'll forget it," Johnny said, anxious eyes on the overalled giant. "He's got this everlastin' fire on his mind. Maybe, after it's over, he'll forget."

"He won't, Johnny. His kind never does."

"You gotta consider," Johnny said. "Walsh—he ain't like us. He come here from a country that's flat an' that's got two main tracks instead of one."

"His mind's single track," Gilchrist muttered. "He came with the book of rules as his bible. The book says thus and so and, as far as he's concerned, all hell could freeze over and nothing in that book could be changed."

"Unless—" Johnny looked up quickly, but didn't finish.

"Unless what?" Gilchrist demanded.

"Well, this fire. Walsh ain't ever been up against anything like this. I been watchin' him. Two days an' two nights now he's been sittin' in that telegraph office. Big general. Cool-like. Calm guy. He's been puttin' up a front while he's quakin' in his guts. I seen his kind in the Army. He's sittin' in there actin' like he's directin' every move, but the

trainmaster's on the line doin' the dirty work because Walsh, up there at the draw, would only be in the way. Know what my hunch is?"

"What's your hunch?"

"He had to say somethin' with authority awhile ago to somebody. He had to let out. You makin' that drop give him the excuse. He had to light on you, Gil. But like I said, I seen guys just like him in the Army, chewin' the loose end of every nerve they got, an' picky as hell about one little thing—like his rules. An' I seen 'em forget an' be human, too."

Gilchrist considered. He looked at Johnny from beneath lowered lids, then he shook his big jowls savagely and said:

"He won't forget, Johnny. He's not that kind."



DUTCH LEMKE, the passenger man, came back from the holocaust with his engine and his crew at ten o'clock. The cars had been left in the Cadiz siding as ordered by Superintendent Walsh. The passenger conductor went into the office to make his report and sign his time slips. Dutch, sweating, and with tear stains on his grimy, round cheeks, leaned heavily against the baggage truck on which Gilchrist sat with Johnny Peters.

"I'm sure as hell glad I'm through with that mess tonight," Dutch said.

"How's it look?" Johnny asked.

"Like hell, an' I ain't speakin' exactly figgertively. It chokes you to death about the time you hit the gorge." Dutch coughed as if to erase the memory of it. "An' the hospital cars. They had ten guys in the tower waitin' for me to bring them cars back. They'll be full before mornin'."

"How's the wind?" Gil asked, his teeth still clenched.

"Like allus, only worst," Dutch answered. "She was blowin' plenty hard when I backed out o' there."

"It always blows in the draw," Johnny Peters said.

The passenger conductor came back to the platform presently. He told Dutch that they were off duty for eight hours of rest. The crew had been on duty more than thirteen hours then.

"The wind," Gilchrist said with a shudder after the others had gone and he again was alone with his conductor.

"The wind in the draw," Johnny said, and perhaps he was thinking as Gilchrist thought. "That's where they'll be licked if they are licked."

Licked! Even as he sat there in the gloom, Gilchrist had a vivid picture in his mind of the red zone of terror and devastation. A twisting valley five miles in length—the pass. At the east end of it was the tower called Cadiz. No town. Just that telegraph outpost and the passing track. At the other end of the pass—the west end—was Moritz, another tower and another siding.

The blaze was being fought at both ends of the pass from which the timber slopes rose steadily upward on either side of the right of way. Five days ago, when the blaze had begun to get really serious, men and tractors cut out a wide swath, parallel with the tracks but a quarter of a mile above them on each side. Yesterday, early in the morning, the blaze had jumped the clearing and a new battle had begun.

The lines had been thrown up closer to the railroad fence. All main line traffic except through passenger trains had been annulled. Other business was being detoured over branch lines to a competing railroad. Fourteen hundred men in shifts had then been thrown into the fight. The railroad had to be kept open at all costs.

The approach to Cadiz, from the east, was first a two-mile tangent, then a two-degree curve. At the end of the curve the track straightened again and went over a wooden trestle three hundred and eighty feet long. At its middle the trestle was seventy feet above the gorge it bridged. Beyond the trestle was a quarter-mile tangent, ascending grade for westward trains, that led up to the tower.

From where Gilchrist sat, twenty miles from the scene, the orange glow was visible in the western sky. The air was dense with smoke haze and the night was sweltering. The odor of the pine and spruce smoke was strong in his nostrils.

"The wind," Gilchrist said, now thinking aloud. "Johnny, the wind! If it shifts like it always does in the draw, all hell can't hold it."



GILCHRIST saw the operator's face first when it happened. Gilchrist stood in the breathless tensiety of the Paxton telegraph office at two o'clock in the morning. Johnny Peters was at his side. They had just returned from the last pull of the mine tracks. The operator, taut over the sounding brass, whipped suddenly in his chair and threw down his pencil.

"It's Moritz," the operator said in a low voice. "No. 2's there. The—the operator says the fire's too close down to the line. No. 2 wants to back away from it. The conductor says he can't come through."

No. 2 was the *Easterner*, the crack eastward passenger run, a solid Pullman train from the Coast.

"Ask Cadiz how things look there," Superintendent Walsh said quietly, but Gilchrist thought there was an effort at restraint in the tone.

Gilchrist saw the operator rattle his key briefly, then listen. Moritz was making some reply. The operator said:

"The conductor refuses to go. He's going to back away from it. He—"

The wire went open; the brass arm of the sounder became still and the operator halted with his mouth wide.

"What's happened to him?" Walsh barked.

Gilchrist saw the superintendent clutching the edge of the table, saw the white along the line of his knuckles.

The operator was trying his key, but the brass did not respond. The operator said:

"Must've gone out. The line must've broken or—"

Then the brass came alive again, fiercely, insistently. Gilchrist, who knew no word of the code, tensed beneath his soiled overclothes and seemed to recognize that a different hand was sending from somewhere out in the miles of dark and flame-orange sky.

He saw the sallow operator turn, come half from his chair and grip the lapels of the super's coat. He heard the tight voice stammer:

"That—that's Cadiz." The clutching fingers trembled violently under the suppressed excitement. "He says 'Moritz lost. Wire out completely. Trainmaster says fire out of control. Send eng—'"

And there it ended. Once more the brass failed. Gilchrist's big fist closed over Johnny's slender wrist. His eyes sought Walsh's face. Walsh was pale and tight lipped; he swallowed convulsively.

"Out of control," he finally said, being very calm on the surface. "See if you can get that wire to working."

The operator tried. No one moved. The operator tested every circuit on his board. Finally, with trembling lips, he half screamed:

"It's the fire! The fire's got 'em! The poles—"

Walsh rose to his full six feet. He was calm, but his face was white. He said:

"Better call Lemke and the rest of that crew. That passenger crew. We can use 'em three hours yet before their hours of service'll expire."

Gilchrist walked through the group and fixed the superintendent with his eyes.

"This is my last night, Mr. Walsh," he said swiftly in a low voice. "I'm suggesting that the delay of getting Lemke and the others called might be—fatal."

"Did I ask you for a suggestion, Gilchrist?"

"There's fourteen hundred men in there," Gilchrist said savagely. "Lemke and that passenger crew's in bed. Five, ten, fifteen minutes. Whatever it takes to get that crew over here might

mean—" He eyed the superintendent.

Superintendent Walsh, drawn to his full height, never batted an eye. Gilchrist saw the cigar in his fingers crumple and drop to the floor.

"God help 'em," the operator choked with a half sob. "I—I got two brothers in there."

He fumbled with the telephone. A tense silence enveloped the crowded office. The operator jiggled the hook. Then he said:

"Quick! Get me the Montana Hotel—Engineer Lemke and—"

The superintendent's big right hand reached out, closed over the transmitter on the instrument; his fingers clamped down the receiver hook. There were veins bulging in the column of his neck, and Gilchrist, sweeping the lean, drawn face with his eyes, saw the throbbing at Walsh's temples.

"On that engine, Gilchrist," Walsh said, his voice cold and without emotion.

"Orders," Gilchrist said. "A form 19 quick, to run extra to Cadiz."

He was asking rapidly for the required authority to make the trip, a green slip of order tissue with the operator's scrawl and the super's signature.

"Move," Walsh said, with tight lipped restraint.

The hand still clutched the phone. Gilchrist wheeled while the cold, passionless eyes still bored him. The phone clattered to the floor as Gilchrist passed through the door with Johnny Peters at his side. Walsh followed with quick, nervous strides.

Peters ran to the main line switch. Gilchrist mounted to the cab of the high-wheeler. Walsh was at his heels. While the fire was banked beneath the passenger engine's boiler, the steam gage stood at a hundred and eighty pounds.

Gilchrist sighted ahead, saw Johnny's lamp go high. He touched the whistle lever twice and yanked the throttle back. The high-wheeler responded with a deafening snort, lunged ahead and slowed enough at the switch for Johnny

Peters to swing aboard.

"How much time do you figure to Cadiz?" Walsh, planting himself at Gilchrist's shoulder, barked above the increasing thunder of the locomotive.

Gilchrist turned to look at the division boss. His wide lips went into a grim smile. He said—

"This is a light engine."

An engine without cars, a light engine, was, according to the time card regulations, restricted to a speed of not more than thirty miles an hour.

"Light engine," Gilchrist repeated, "and twenty miles to go."

"Wide open," Walsh snapped.

"And," said Gilchrist, "there's a slow order on the new track at Tumbling River bridge. Twenty-five per, the order said. At least when I made my last main line trip."

"Wide open," Walsh retorted. "How long wide open?"

Gilchrist jerked his watch from the bib pocket of his overalls.

"You're the boss," he shot, every fiber of his body tense. "Wide open—maybe fifteen minutes. Maybe less. But the rules—"

"Wide open!" Walsh thundered, the restraint now gone from his tone.

Gilchrist's reply was to suit action to the ordered word. He hooked his lever for the closest cut-off, and the exhaust in the squat stack became a fierce, drumming roll. Gilchrist laced out the throttle, notch by notch, and stuck his head into the smoke filled night. The high-wheeler, like a demon alive, plunged with the smash and pound of polished drivers at the yawning, murky space its headlight cut into.

There had been no time to get Gilchrist's fireman from the mine-job engine. Johnny Peters, having hung his lantern on the blower valve, now bent over the scoop, not expertly, but with sufficient skill to keep the pin on the gage at two hundred pounds. Walsh, Gilchrist saw from a side glance across the cab, had climbed to the fireman's seat with a dead cigar in his mouth.

The forward truck wheels of the dizzily roaring engine bit into a sweeping left hand curve, seemed to careen far out to the right and ride on one set of wheels, while Gilchrist, clinging to his arm rest, jerked his whistle cord and bellowed a blast of speeding triumph to nothing in particular.

The wide flung orange in the western sky became more intense each mile the rocketing passenger engine covered. The smoke became thicker and, when the engine roared mightily at the bridge across Tumbling River, where the rules said twenty-five an hour, the superintendent coughed into his handkerchief while Johnny Peters climbed up to Gilchrist's side and spoke through the sweat that rimmed his lips with glistening beads.

"Rules," Johnny said in a hoarse whisper. "Will she stay on the railroad, Gil?"

"If she don't, Johnny," Gil hurled back, his body bouncing on the swaying seat, "you better start praying now."

The grade to Albans rolled beneath them, with the blurred drumming of the wheels over the rail joints a rattling protest at the stress on steel and spike and tie. The Albans semaphore signal, set at its accustomed red, blinked imperatively out of the haze. Gilchrist, seeing it with blinking, smarting eyes, tore at his whistle with four short blasts. He called for the clear of the green but never touched his air.



WHAT the operator at Albans might have thought will not be recorded here, but the high-wheeler bore down on the lonely cabin with its smoke plume flat over its long black back, and just as the engine pilot smashed at the facing points of the empty siding, the signal went quickly to green right in Gilchrist's face.

"Clear," Gilchrist yelled in the customary signal check, but there was no repeating cry from where the superintendent sat.

Gilchrist wondered whether the superintendent saw. Perhaps the superintendent's mind was on those fourteen hundred warriors who, at this moment, might be hopelessly trapped in the Cadiz draw.

The thought, at least, was in Gilchrist's mind, and he snapped out his watch to read the story of his mad and bitter flight. Then Walsh was standing, choking at his side while all around them was the awful tint of orange and the awful smell of pine and spruce.

"Three minutes," Gil whipped out. "You better take off your coat and vest and shirt."

"Shirt?" Walsh called back.

"I'll show you. You, too, Johnny."

Gilchrist slammed the cab windows shut and the hot blast from the draw was cut from them. Then he raced across the rocking cab and closed the windows on the fireman's side.

"Take off your shirts!"

Then he closed his throttle and tried to see through the smoke against which his headlight played, but the light was worse than useless, so he reached up and snapped the switch that plunged the front end into the reddening darkness. He brought the air valve around. His head was cocked to one side as if he might be listening, but he was feeling—feeling the rails beneath him, waiting for the two-degree curve which would bring him to the trestle across the gorge and then to the slight upgrade to the tower.

The engine listed presently and Gilchrist brought it expertly to a stop. He tried to see ahead, but could make out nothing. The heat in the cab was terrific.

"What—"

Gilchrist stopped Walsh's question. He tore his jumper from him, then half tore off his soiled and sweat soaked blue shirt. He took the cold water hose from the tank, fighting back a coughing spasm. Walsh and Johnny were coughing violently. Gilchrist soaked the shirt. Then he took the super's shirt

and soaked that. Then Johnny's. Presently, conserving breath and energy, he said—

"This way."

Around his mouth and nostrils he wrapped the dripping garment. The others imitated him.

"Don't talk," he shouted at them. "Don't strain. Watch me, and do what I say. From the way the smoke is here that gorge must be full of fire."

Under the protection of the wet shirts the coughing ceased. Gilchrist opened his throttle lightly. He crept along at the pace of a loaded handcar. He felt his way around the curve and then, when he knew the trestle was almost at his pilot trucks, he stopped again. He could see little through the smoke.

"I'm going down on the ground," he said in muffled speech. "If the trestle's still clear of the blaze we can get the engine over. If it's not—"

He backed into the gangway. Then, to Johnny:

"If the trestle won't carry the engine, I'll have to do something else. You stay with the engine, Johnny."

It was a job of tedious groping. Nearer the ground the air was better. The wind was howling. The crackle of the flames was close. He could see the upward licking tongues on the slopes ahead. He couldn't see the tower, or the cars in the Cadiz siding.

Presently he made out the trestle. He dropped to his knees, crawling, dripping. The fire was down on the timbered banks of the gorge, far below him, sending the smoke belching upward under the fan of the wind. The under supports of the structure were burning. The flame was slow. A cold panic seized him for a moment, then he thought, "Damn close to 'em at the tower, but the engine might never get across. God!"

"What is it?"

Then he knew that Walsh was there groping at his side. But he didn't answer. There was no more time to lose. He went back to the engine and shouted

tersely at the dim form of his conductor. He spent less than thirty seconds on the job. Then he was back at the trestle with the licking flames far below the rail heads.

"She'll never hold the engine," Gilchrist bellowed through his shirt at Walsh.

He explained nothing more. He knew that every ounce of his strength was needed now. He didn't even warn Walsh to turn back. He dropped over, stooping low, and felt for the ties of the trestle with his feet.

Foot by foot he threaded across it, stopping now and then to allow his heart to ease off from its mad pounding. Tie by tie he struggled. And finally his feet touched solid earth again.

His first plunge was for the right of way ditch. His eyes were blinded by the awful smoke, and the tears that coursed down his cheeks mixed with his sweat. He was wet as if from a plunge in a stream, and his overalls were clinging to his powerful body.

All about him was a glowing world, and somewhere above him fourteen hundred men were waiting for deliverance. He clenched his fists and struggled on, conscious of nothing now save a will to reach the tower a little more than a thousand feet away.

Suddenly, under a burst of shifting wind through the draw the smoke seemed to lift from about him and he made out forms of men ahead, close. It was then, too, that he saw Walsh almost at his heels, groping along.

The trainmaster and the operator, gagging behind first aid masks at nose and throat, grabbed Gilchrist by the arms.

"The engine," the trainmaster panted. "Where's the engine? God, man! We can't last much longer—"

"The trestle," Gilchrist barked. "It'll hold a car at a time, but it won't hold the engine. You got 'em loaded? The men?"

"Loaded to the last one of 'em. What—what's that you say about the

bridge?" he shouted.

"A car at a time," Gilchrist bellowed, lifting his shirt from his mouth. "You ride the first one. Tell Johnny. He's on the engine. Couple in and tell Johnny the play. We'll make it all right."

Then, silent to gasping queries, Gilchrist reached the first car of the string, one of the hospital cars, went to the rear end, broke the air hose and pulled the coupling pin.

"You better ride it," he said to the bewildered trainmaster. "Here. I'll get men to give it a shove. The bridge'll hold the car."

The trainmaster crawled to the front vestibule. Fifteen men got their dripping shoulders against the hind end. The trainmaster kicked off the hand brakes. The wheels screeched, but they rolled. Slowly at first, then faster. The car left the others. Gilchrist wanted to shout. The rescue was under way. Now if the flames on the lower edge of the trestle didn't get too bad—



ONE by one, under a mighty shove, with the world crackling and roaring and red about them, the men got the human cargo moving down. As each car rolled free Gilchrist waited, gave it time to clear the trestle, then started the next.

Above the roar of that Bitter Roots inferno, above the crackle and howl, there came back to Gilchrist every few minutes the blast of his whistle. That was Johnny's way of letting him know that the cars were safely over. The blast of the whistle gave him heart.

"You maybe better ride this one," Gilchrist told Walsh as the tenth car, with its crowd of shouting, half mad men, was cut from the string. "And tell Johnny to keep on with the whistle. That's helping a lot."

"You're coming on the last one?" Walsh said back through his gasps.

"I'll listen for the whistle when I roll down the hill."

Each car, manned with a sane minded,

stalwart son of the mountains at the hand brake, rolled away through the smoke, its interior lights a sickly blur that finally was swallowed up as the car dropped down the grade. And shortly after would come the blast of the whistle, Johnny Peters counting them off as they safely passed over that three hundred and eighty feet of roaring space on the trestle above the white hot gorge.

And finally there came the last of the eighteen cars to go. Gilchrist had lost all sense of time. Like all the others, he too had a load and, after some willing hands got the wheels to moving and had climbed back on, Gilchrist let his hand brake free and felt the wheels getting their momentum as the car plunged for the bridge.

Half blinded, he stood there in the forward vestibule, seared fingers clenched about the iron rim of the brake wheel. Once he tightened on the wheel to see if his brake was good, and felt some relief when he felt the chain beneath the frame go taut. He released then, and let it go.

He hit the trestle before he knew it. He couldn't see it, but the hollow roll of the wheels on the steel told him that he was over the gorge. He was coughing badly, saving his breath. Once he thought consciousness was going from him, and he held the wheel of the brake tighter. He tried to count off the feet of his progress so he would know when to begin to tighten down.

Panic then took vicious hold of his heart for he felt a sway that was not the normal movement of the rolling car. Flame was licking up between the ties.

In that moment he forgot to measure his feet, he forgot everything but a hurried prayer for safety, and then to his ears came commanding shouts, sounding muffled and far away. He could see nothing beyond the screen of flame and the swirling smoke above it. He grabbed his wheel instinctively, however, and began to tighten down.

The momentum of the car was but

little reduced when the crash came. At first Gilchrist wasn't fully aware of what it was. But in another second he heard Walsh yell and he heard the train-master. Then he knew. He was over the trestle and had hit the rear of his train.

"For God's sake!" somebody was shouting fiercely. "The couplin' missed. Get 'em out o' that car!"

Gilchrist opened the vestibule door and yelled:

"All out! Fast!" He wasn't sure that he was right, but he led the way through the front and stopped at the door and said, "This way. Not the back. The back's not clear of the bridge." He didn't know exactly how he knew that, but he spoke the truth.

The crowd fought at the exit, and Gilchrist straightened the men out and yelled at them and drove them on. They dropped in twos and sometimes in huddled threes to the ballast where some one else was herding them into the car ahead.

"Hurry! Hurry!"

Gilchrist heard the cries. He didn't know who was doing the yelling. Presently he looked along the aisle of his car; it was empty.

"Get that crazy fool out of there!" somebody was yelling—and then the car listed sharply to the left.

There followed a great upward play of sparks and smoke. Gilchrist whirled for safety in a desperate rush, made the vestibule and dropped off the steps. He felt more dead than alive.

"Here, men! Grab him! The bridge—"

The bridge went, first with a mighty buckle near its middle, then a plunge outward to the left and downward. A rending crash; the ripping and tearing of timbers. The steel car, the last of the eighteen, cascaded into the sacrifice; and the flames and the vast white belch of the sparks shot their howling glory to the sky . . .

Engine No. 1691, high-wheeled passenger jack, running backward, snaked the seventeen steel coaches hooked to

its pilot through the tortuous curves of the Bitter Roots and down to the white water of Tumbling River. The tang of spruce and pine smoke still hung heavily in the cab, but the shirt that had been tied at Gilchrist's mouth and nostrils was at his feet. He was looking into the dark beyond the end of his tender on which a lantern hung, the only light to guide him on his way.

He touched the air slightly, checked the pace of his train, jerked the whistle lever for a crossing blow. Johnny Peters, still doing the honors with the scoop, straightened and yanked at Gilchrist's sleeve. Johnny shouted:

"Back to the main line for you, eh? Man, you sure earned—"

"That's what he said," Gilchrist replied with a grin, remembering that fumbling, awkward pat on the back

that Walsh had given him just before he opened his throttle to leave the scene of the holocaust. "You had him figured right, Johnny. He *can* forget. He told me so."

"I seen them kind in the war," Johnny said, mopping his face. "Strict as hell until somethin' come up. That's Walsh. He's never seen this kind o' thing, Gil. But you noticed when we started for the draw—he forget everything. Why, Gil, accordin' to the book we ain't got no more rights bein' here where we are than the man in the moon. Ever since we left Paxton we been breakin' every rule that was ever wrote."

"You heard what he said. Wide open."

"An'," said Johnny, "I ain't ever gonna be the same hereafter."



SHELLS

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

IT DOES not take long for a man to get used to almost anything in time of war—even barrage fire. But, when a dozen heavy naval guns open their fireworks on you without your being able to answer shot for shot, that is a horse of a different color.

This is exactly what happened to us in Palestine on several occasions during the World War, especially around Gaza. There I once nearly got blown off the map by a British monster naval shell as I was sitting comfortably behind a dune munching a hard earned sandwich, richly seasoned with chopped-up garlic for lack

of butter. The shell, about my size, and a lyddite one at that, struck the opposite side of the dune some fifteen yards away, causing me to turn, I suppose, a triple somersault with my blessed sandwich halfway down my throat.

That incident, plus another one—when one of our Turkish recruits turned a roaring flame of liquid fire on me by mistake, making me jump head over heels into the nearest trench to save my hide—multiplied by a hundred, still fall short of the disagreeable sensation which I experienced once in Constantinople.

I was riding peacefully across the rail-

road yards of the Haidar Pasha station. At that moment the station, with warehouses and all, blew up like a roaring volcano. I still can see the body of my favorite dog, a tiny Affenpincher which accompanied me, as it crumpled at the feet of my rearing horse after the first of the numberless explosions which caused two or three hundred carloads of ammunition, high explosives, and many thousands of piled up barrels of gasoline to go up in smoke, with a crash that shook Constantinople to its very foundations. At first the inhabitants believed that the Allied fleets had succeeded, after all, in forcing the Dardanelles and were bombing the town.

That disaster was due, as I heard afterward, to the carelessness of some Turkish soldiers who were unloading several *mahonas*, large freight barges, laden with ammunition, which were moored to the wharfs.

By the time the first boxful of shells exploded, I was, as I mentioned previously, riding across the railroad yards (having stopped, incidentally, to ask a German noncom why his commander had ordered a lot of tents full of medical supplies and convalescent soldiers to be pitched in the midst of those hundreds of carloads of ammunition) when the first explosion, only a few dozen yards away from us, fairly threw me out of the saddle, and left the lifeless body of my poor little dog in front of my horse.

The first explosion was followed almost immediately by a second. Needless to say that by the time the third terrific crash rent the air I was fairly on my way, galloping like the wind from that thundering volcano amid a terror crazed mob of travelers and hangers-on, whom the disaster had surprised during the height of the train-time rush. A few moments later, whole carloads of explosives and gasoline were hurtling into the air like so many sky rockets, while the cars loaded with small ammunition let out a continuous rattle, like that of rifle fire along a battleline.

When, after desperate efforts, I finally

reached the main street of Kadi-Köi, which extended like a boulevard along the southern shore of Haidar Pasha Bay, an entire warehouse, crammed full of ammunition or dynamite, burst open with a roar and fell back to earth like a curtain of molten lava.

The shock caused by that exploding warehouse was so far-reaching that nearly all the windows facing the sea, more than a mile away, were shattered. As for me, I was lifted partly out of the saddle by the concussion. The panic in the surrounding suburbs and in Constantinople itself was indescribable. People were running madly up and down the streets, leaving their shops and homes open and unguarded.

That afternoon and all night the fire raged, devouring what had been the most spacious railroad station in Asia Minor, perhaps in all the Balkans; reducing to ashes millions of pounds sterling invested in those buildings and war materials.

After sunset, irresistibly attracted by that enormous pyre, my orderly and I kept drawing closer, cautiously. About midnight we entered the burning main building of the station, which flooded like a gigantic torch the rippling waters of the Bosphorus with scarlet light. The heat had been so intense that a row of pleasure yachts, moored over a hundred yards offshore, had caught fire. Close to the wharfs, slowly drifting on the blue-black waters and tinged purple by the reflection of the flames, half a dozen blazing and smoking *mahonas* were at the mercy of the waves, like so many Viking funeral barges.

After observing that Dante-esque scene for awhile, my orderly and I took refuge in the ruined station restaurant where we ran into a squad of German soldiers doing salvage work. As soon as we got home, Tasim produced a bottle of thirty-year-old brandy which one of the German soldiers had offered him as a present, and which Tasim, really, should not have accepted. But it tasted pretty good just the same.

The DEVIL'S

DONALD RICHMOND, alias Don Everhard, was born a gentleman; but much of his time had been spent in the underworld, which he hated, fighting crookdom wherever he found it. His peculiar talents were invaluable to J. K. James, the Washington undercover man, in his war with *La Tête de Mort*, an international gang of blackmailers, whose headquarters were believed to be in Paris. James sent Everhard to France in a fanfare of publicity which made it appear that the American was fleeing the police, with but one helpful lead: Isobel de Nevers, a Parisian actress, was definitely known to be a tool of the gang . . .

On the boat Everhard was approached by a young woman who gave her name as Vilette Laramie, and became suspicious of her when she warned him against going to Paris.

The girl mysteriously dropped from sight before the boat docked; and Everhard was not surprised to receive, a few days after his arrival in the city, an invitation to call on Isobel de Nevers.

By chance Everhard met a Prince Hovenden, who took him to his club, the Horseshoe. There the American became friendly with a wealthy Greek named Dodalus, who told him that Charles Birk Kurlingen, a professional gambler Everhard had had difficulty with in the past, often came to the club.

Calling on Isobel de Nevers, Everhard discovered Vilette waiting to receive him.



The girl told him that as Isobel, she was a member of the blackmailers; as Vilette Laramie, a police operative. She warned him against Hovenden, one of the gang; hinted that the chief was interested in him, Everhard; and told him that the passport of the criminals was a Death's Head ring, with a miniature of the wearer under the skull.

One morning Everhard was stopped in the hall of his house by a pretty, flashily dressed woman, who introduced herself as Madame Fifi Guyot. She told him her husband was away, and she was lonesome. Everhard scented a trap, and refused to enter her apartment. His servant, Mademoiselle Houlette, answered his question about the Guyots by

PASSPORT



Continuing a Novel of Don Everhard

By

GORDON
YOUNG

stating enigmatically that madame seemed to have a lot of diamonds for one apparently in moderate circumstances.

A short time later Charles Birk Kurlingen called on Everhard. The man was greatly excited as he pleaded with Everhard to help him out of a dangerous position.

"Help me, Don, and I'll make you millions!" Everhard decided to bluff.

"Rot! You're in dutch with La Tête de Mort, and they're giving you a last chance to handle me. You're through—"

At that moment Mademoiselle Houlette announced from the door:

"Monsieur is called on the phone. A woman's voice says it is a matter of life and death!"

EVERHARD went quickly, thinking of Vilette. Mademoiselle Houlette closed the door behind him. He walked rapidly down the corridor to the telephone. She followed slowly.

"Hello—"

A voice, not Vilette's, but a voice that made him think the owner must be pretty, dress daintily and move in an aura of heady perfume, asked—

"This is Monsieur Donald Richmond?"

"So I've been told."

"Ah, monsieur, but this is serious! You do not know me—"

"Everything but your name."

"Oh, please!"

"You," said Everhard impatiently,

"are in a cabaret without money enough for the bill. No, I won't come—or send it."

"Please! Please!" She was evidently trying to be hysterical. "This is life and death, monsieur!" Very rapidly, as if to keep him from interrupting, "Tonight I was at the Opera, and in the box two men sat behind me. During the intermission they spoke Russian, no doubt thinking I could not understand them—Are you listening?"

"Yes; go on."

He was a little curious as to why she should be lying over the telephone at this hour of the morning.

"I heard one give this number to the other, and I remembered it. I heard one say to the other, 'You will telephone this Monsieur Donald Richmond in the morning, and he will meet you. You will then bring him to the place I told you of and he will be taken care of.' The other laughed and said, 'Yes, with a knife to his throat.'"

"Monsieur, I returned home and I could not sleep. I was so troubled that at last I decided I must telephone you so that—"

"Sweet of you. But if you've made a wager that I'll come in person tomorrow to thank you, why, pay it like a good sport! You see, it wasn't Russian they spoke, but Chinese. All my enemies are Chinese. Goodby, and don't let it trouble your sleep!"

"But, monsieur, listen!" she screamed, really hysterical now.

At that moment he heard a shot—not through the receiver but from the front room. In the half instant's pause before he dropped the receiver, laughter, hysterical and triumphant, came over the wire.

Mademoiselle Houlette, who was nearer the door than Everhard, threw it open—to fall back, horrified. Everhard roughly pushed by her, his hand shoulder high under his dressing gown.

Kurlingen lay sprawled in the massive chair, not a full arm's length from the heavy drapes that twitched in the draft

at the sides of the open French windows. His body, with the left hand hanging limply, lay over against an arm of the chair. The smell of burned powder was strong; and there was another smell, too. There was a blue-black hole near Kurlingen's right temple.

On the floor, slightly to the left of him, lay a big automatic as if it might have fallen from his left hand.

The windows were tall. The drapes came to within a few inches of the floor. Everhard, turning quickly about, scrutinized the big room and peered below the gathered hangings, looking, not hopefully, for the feet and ankles of the murderer.

"He has killed himself?" asked Houlette.

"His kind do it with food, booze, girls. He'd no more have shot himself than you can bite off your own nose." Everhard added quickly, with an accusing stare, "Looks like you've won this pot!"

"Whatever does monsieur mean!" The woman was still in the doorway.

"Yeah, I wonder!" Everhard said, turning about.

There were three doors opening into the big front room—one to the apartment hallway, where she now stood; one to the small, seldom used dining room beyond which lay the kitchen; one to his own room.

He went through the apartment, searching. In the kitchen he found the back door still locked from the inside. He went into Houlette's room, looked in the closet, behind the door, under the bed. He took one room after another, even opening the big wood box where logs and wire bound faggots were stored for the fireplace.

As he came again into the front room, Mademoiselle Houlette, who appeared not to have moved from her tracks, exclaimed—

"What do you do, monsieur?"

"I'm looking for a collar button, of course."

Everhard eyed her angular, wrinkled face and felt it useless to point out to her

that no one could have entered this apartment, or left furtively, without her connivance. It did not seem even worthwhile to tell her that Kurlingen had been framed by a false message and had come promptly at twelve o'clock; that the woman who spoke of Russians on the telephone had known the very moment to draw Everhard from the room on the plea of life and death; that it was his own automatic .45 that lay on the floor beside the dead Kurlingen. Everhard felt that Mademoiselle Houlette knew and understood all those little things ever so much better than he did. He was also quite sure that Mademoiselle Houlette would forget, and deny, that she knew Everhard was not in the room with Kurlingen when the shot was fired.

"Monsieur! It *must* be that he killed himself!"

"Of course." Everhard agreed quite as if he had never made any denial of it. "What makes you think he didn't? Call the police."

"The police, monsieur!"

"The police, mademoiselle. That is, unless you want to help me heave him out the window into the Seine, clean up the bad spots and say nothing to anybody."

"Oh, monsieur! Then he has not killed himself!"

Everhard had the uneasy impression that she was about to throw herself against his breast and weep. Women—some women—were like that. After they help frame a man for a jam, they suddenly remember that after all he isn't such a bad fellow, and are sorry. And in spite of his suspicions all along, he had become rather fond of Houlette.

"Call the police, mademoiselle."

Everhard watched, waiting for her to get out of the room.



THE moment she was out of sight in the hallway, Everhard threw off the dressing gown, not wanting its skirt trailing in the mess about Kurlingen's chair.

With handkerchief in hand, and mov-

ing warily, he stooped to the gun on the floor. It was, as he had guessed, one of his own guns. He knew his guns as a woman knows her jewels. He had put it away in a locked drawer in his room. No doubt his own fingerprints on the oil film had somehow been carefully preserved by the murderer. But Kurlingen had killed himself. That, supposedly, was mademoiselle's idea, and Everhard meant to make it stick. He glanced toward the doorway. She was speaking at the telephone.

With one corner of the handkerchief about the gun's muzzle, he rubbed it all over, carefully. He pressed up the safety catch with the edge of his thumbnail.

Kurlingen had been shot in the right temple, pointblank. That was where Mr. Murderer had miscued. Too near. How he got so close without Kurlingen's letting out a frightened bellow, Everhard could not imagine. He had played too much poker with Kurlingen not to know that he was right handed.

Everhard pulled the dead man's right hand out at arm's length. He put the ball of Kurlingen's thumb firmly against the trigger, folded the four fingers over the handle, pressed them firmly and let Kurlingen's arm fall.

Still holding the muzzle by the handkerchief, he pushed the safety down with edge of his thumbnail, and laid the gun on the floor, precisely where he had found it. An odd place for a gun to have landed when it fell from a suicide's right hand—but that was where it was. Let the police figure it out as best they could.

Everhard bent forward, scrutinizing the big, diamond-like stud; then recalling how Kurlingen had hastily thrust a small object back into his vest pocket while feeling for his cigaret case, Everhard dipped finger and thumb into the pocket and found a platinum ring, fashioned into skull and crossbones.

"Plain as day," said Everhard to himself, eyeing the ring quickly and thrusting it into his trousers pocket. "They were through with him anyhow. He had it coming. And so used him as bad

fish to bait the lobster trap for me. Now we shall see what we shall see!"

Everhard, in the dressing gown, with both hands deep in the side pockets, was sitting moodily on the table's corner when Mademoiselle Houlette returned.

"The police will come at once, monsieur."

He looked up, watching her. Her voice was low and hinted pity for him. Her eyes were not so bright as ought to have been the eyes of one who had just helped put over a fast one on a trusting, unsuspicious fellow like himself.

"Mademoiselle, this is a very puzzling affair. Very. All we can do is to tell the police everything, just as it happened. One must always tell the truth, even to the police."

"Yes, monsieur," she answered doubtfully.

"And, mademoiselle," he said softly, with a twisted smile and a look that had made bolder persons than Houlette uneasy, "you please will not forget that we were both out of the room when the shot was fired!"

"Oh, monsieur, how could I?"

"Mmm-hmm. It has been done. Don't you try it."

"What can monsieur mean?"

"Just that!"

"Oh!" It was a gasp. Surprise flared up in her gray eyes. "Oh, monsieur can not believe that I—I—"

"You what?"

"That I am not his friend!"

"Why, mademoiselle, whatever could have suggested to you that I do not trust you implicitly?"

Everhard smiled at her, very pleasantly, pleased to see that she looked baffled and a little frightened. He looked at the floor, pointing.

"And, of course, we must touch nothing—but that does look very much like one of my guns. So let us now go together and see if Kurlingen—who, as every one knows, was a sick man, badly worried over money—did not slip into my room and take the gun from the drawer while I was at the telephone lis-

tening to the sweet voiced woman who tried to flirt at this odd hour of the morning!"

He strode into the next room. She followed as if reluctant. The drawer was tightly closed, but unlocked. His shirts lay undisturbed in the corner of the drawer where he had placed the gun. With a quick flip he rumbled and pushed them aside. Pointing as she came near, he said—

"You see, the holster is empty."

"But, monsieur, how would he know where to look?"

"Oh, Kurlingen knew I always kept a gun about. And, mademoiselle, it is very fortunate that my loving care of guns is such that I always—*always*, you understand?—wipe them carefully with a slightly oiled rag before I lay them away. You see, if any fingerprints are left, it might bring on rust. Therefore Kurlingen's fingerprints, and his only, will show."

She looked rather dazed, as if confusedly struggling to understand; then with an eagerness like hope—

"So he did kill himself, monsieur?"

"Oh, absolutely. No doubt of it," said Everhard matter-of-factly.

The police might find a lot of loose ends dangling to the story, and smell an unsolved mystery; but Everhard thought that would be all right. At least he had broken down the frameup, or badly cracked it.

The doorbell rang.

"Monsieur, the police have come!" Houlette said anxiously.

"All right; show them in."

As soon as her back was turned Everhard went quickly to the closet and reached hurriedly to the inside pocket of a coat hanging there where he had left the two extra passports in a stamped, carefully sealed envelop, ready for instant mailing at the nearest box to a fictitious name, care of the American Express.

He could not mail them now, but he wanted to get hold of them and be ready, somehow, to ditch them, if the

police showed any intention of making a thorough search.

At best, it looked bad for Kurlingen to be dead in his apartment; and being caught with two or more passports would be almost as troublesome at any time as being caught with as many wives. The Parisian police, having much understanding of human nature, would listen more patiently to an explanation about the wives than about the passports—but would know you were lying in either case.

Everhard groped hastily, drew out his wallet, bulky with large franc notes—but the envelop was gone.



TWO policemen came into the front room. They were young, soldierly, wearing toy-like automatics in black flap holsters.

These two *agents* were like the advance scouts of an army that was soon to march up in full force. Madame Thurot, the concierge, was at their heels, looking very like a blowsy campfollower with her too small peignoir over a flannel nightgown. Little Thurot appeared from behind her, as if he had come stealthily, sheltered by her bulk. He had been at Verdun, but peered at Kurlingen as if this were the first time he had ever seen a dead man, and made soft little sounds of astonishment and regret. Then he turned as if fleeing. More representatives of the law were coming. It would not do to have the police wait in the rain before the nail studded doors. Madame Thurot shook her head sadly.

The two young *agents* laid aside their wet cloaks, took out notebooks. They calmly asked questions, carefully scribbled the answers, and seemed neither to believe nor disbelieve what they were told. They inspected and retained Everhard's passport; demanded Mademoiselle Houlette's card of identity. One went to the telephone. The other continued with questions. Everhard wished that some of the people who have an idea that the French are always excitable had been in his shoes.

More police came; some in uniform, some from the Sûreté—the detective bureau. These were the fellows Everhard dreaded. They were middle aged, rather small, very gracious and sympathetic; they spoke softly, moved quietly, and nodded as if sympathetically believing everything they were told.

Mademoiselle Houlette was tensely calm, spoke freely, appeared truthful.

Everhard wondered why, and turned thoughtfully to the window. Rain splattered on the ledge. The Seine, sleepiest of rivers, lay black and motionless. Far below the lights of Kurlingen's waiting automobile threw dim blotches of light on the wet quay. Street lamps glowed hazily. A few taxicabs, like bright eyed bugs scurrying out of the wet, fled across the bridges and disappeared.

The apartment was full of *agents*; then two more came. One was unimportant, being a kind of secretary. The other was most unwelcome to Everhard, being Monsieur Biradou. Every man turned toward him respectfully and stood as if at attention. Kurlingen, a notable figure in Paris, was dead. Monsieur Biradou had been notified. He had come. He gave Everhard one look—cold, aloof, full of what seemed to be most disagreeable meaning. Then he ignored Everhard.

Biradou's eyes snapped. He questioned the *agents* with nervous rapidity, all the while glancing about as if not listening to what was said. Erect, trim, decisive, he seemed vaguely impatient that other men could not think as fast as he.

He began to question Madame Thurot, who was frightened, and Mademoiselle Houlette, who stuck to simple facts and told the truth. His questions jumped from one to the other of them, but he seemed to pay no attention to what they said.

Everhard clenched his hands deep in the pockets of his gown.

"He knows more about what happened here than any of us!" he decided.

Without even glancing at Everhard, Biradou demanded—

"Monsieur, you will please tell what happened."

Everhard told just what happened until Kurlingen was found dead.

"So he pretended that he thought you had invited him, eh?" Biradou was looking out of the window. He appeared a little bored. His tone was icy. "The woman who telephoned—you do not know her?" Biradou walked away from the window. He bent over, looking at the automatic, but explained in a tone that sounded to Everhard very like irony, "Monsieur is such a man as interests certain ladies of Paris. They take various pretexts to arrange introductions." A flashing glance hit Everhard's eyes squarely. "Do you always tell the truth so readily?"

Everhard bowed.

"Certainly, monsieur—to the police."

Biradou looked as if he wanted to say "Bah!" Walking away, he said over his shoulder—

"This offer of his by which you were to make millions—what was the nature of it?"

"He did not say, monsieur. I was called to the phone."

"But you had plainly let him know you would have nothing to do with it—" Biradou made the statement encouragingly, as if trying to lure an affirmation.

Everhard bowed, not speaking.

"Ah, so," said Biradou. "Let us see. Being ruined and in poor health, he knew, as you Americans say, that the jig was up. You left the room. He knew you owned a gun. But why, monsieur, do you go armed in Paris?"

"An old permit, if you please. Issued during the war, monsieur."

"The war happens to be over," said Biradou. Many of the *agents* smiled discreetly. Biradou spun about on his heel, shot the question and glance with tremendous impact, "If he shot himself, the fingerprints would indicate it, would they not?"

Everhard said mildly—

"I am not very familiar with such things, but I presume so."

"Then," said Biradou irritably, "the gun shall be examined at once!" It sounded to Everhard just as if Biradou had said, "That'll cinch you!"

He crossed the room again, stooped, took Kurlingen's left hand, touched the third finger; then instantly and accurately his glance struck Everhard's eye. He did not expect Kurlingen to be wearing the ring, but with significant pantomime was asking a question.

The answer he got was just about the same as if across a green baize table he had asked Everhard what cards he held.

He dropped the hand, straightened, shot one of those direct, quick glances at Houlette, as if not at all pleased with her; then, addressing no one in particular:

"Very simple. No doubt at all, Monsieur Richmond has told the truth." To Everhard's alert ear that sounded a wee bit mocking. "Have the gun examined and fingerprints compared. Monsieur is to be regarded as the victim of an unlucky circumstance—until then!"

He bowed coldly to Everhard, with uplifted, searching eyes; then went away abruptly, followed by the secretarial person, and somehow left behind him the impression that he had been summoned about a trifle; that it was bad—too bad—other men couldn't see things for themselves without troubling him, especially as he had matters of importance on hand . . .

The city was beginning to stir. From a side street below there came the slow beat of heavily shod horses on the wood block pavement, and the jingle of bells. The garbage wagon was abroad and the bells warned the concierges to get their cans outside—if they were the heartless kind of concierges who kept their cans indoors, away from the queer human maggots, the *chiffonniers*, who loot rubbish pails in the early dawn.

The attitude of the *agents* changed. They were extremely cautious and care-

ful. Everhard was not left alone a half second. Some went away, others came. Among them reporters. Everhard, gambler and rum pirate, was back on the front page. But reporters in Paris do not dare cut capers as in America; the police step on enterprising meddlers in a murder case, or suicide. Photographs were taken of the room. The automatic was carried away in an exhibit case. (Months passed before Everhard got it back.) His fingerprints were inked. Kurlingen's and Mademoiselle Houlette's also. It seemed that they would never remove the body.

There was a crowd coming and going on the stairs until noon. A shiny eyed, bald little man with an escort of clerks came, almost cheerfully. He told Everhard proudly that Monsieur Biradou had been, as usual, right. It was suicide. Now they would have an inquest. It seemed an unending inquest. All the stories were repeated, but now without suspicious examination.

Everhard thought the fleeting expression on the angular face of the long legged Houlette, when she heard that Kurlingen's fingerprints, very perfectly, were on the gun, was most interesting. Something like that of the hypothetical man who first swallowed an oyster.

At last Everhard shook hands at the doorway with the little, shining eyed man who had a portfolio under his arm. He was cheerily sympathetic, asked Everhard's pardon for the trouble he had been put to and, with a shrug and two words, expressed his opinion of a man so discourteous as to kill himself in the apartment of another.

CHAPTER XIV

KURLINGEN'S MURDERER

EVERHARD went to Mademoiselle Houlette's room, did not knock, but flung the door wide and stepped in.

She turned quickly from a half opened drawer and exclaimed reproachfully—

"Monsieur!" She looked puzzled.

"The show's over. Stop acting."

"Monsieur forgets that I do not understand English."

"Unless you hear it through the key-hole?"

"Oh, can monsieur believe that I—"

"Monsieur can, sister. So come clean as it may look a bit nasty to have another suicide here so soon. However, I understand how such things are arranged. By this time you know that."

"But I am monsieur's friend!"

"So was Kurlingen. See what happened to him!"

"But, monsieur—"

"And a package addressed for mailing was removed from my coat."

"Oh—"

"Oh, yes. And the person who took the gun did not take it."

"Oh—but how can monsieur know that?"

"Because a wallet was in the same pocket—and remained. He would have taken the wallet."

"Ah—"

"Only you, mademoiselle, of all the people in Paris, have had the chance to go through my pockets or look under my pillow when I was at the bath. Only you knew that I carried such a package ready for mailing. It is sealed carefully, so you did not venture to tamper. But last night you thought I would think it had been stolen by whoever killed Kurlingen. And you were curious. You should have been less honest and taken the wallet too. My package, mademoiselle, if you please!"

Everhard held out his hand.

Houlette's face grew red; her lips trembled a little. She fumbled with the buttons on her flat breast.

"It is not as you think, monsieur."

But she drew out the envelop.

"It seems it is precisely as I think. Thank you."

He examined the flap carefully. It had not been opened.

"Oh, monsieur," she said quickly, and gestured with pleading, "when I saw

the man was dead, I knew the police must come. While monsieur searched the apartment, I took what monsieur had been so careful to keep concealed ready for mailing. I hid it. I was afraid monsieur would forget."

"So thoughtful. Why did you not want the police to find it?"

"Because I am monsieur's friend. I was afraid it might embarrass him if it fell into the wrong hands."

"You could not have spoken to me remindingly?"

"That would have made monsieur know that I had spied on him. Monsieur, please, you believe me?"

"Oh, indeed, mademoiselle. Every word you say. You would not deceive me, would you?"

"I am monsieur's friend."

"Then who the hell planted you on me?"

"Planted, monsieur?"

"Planted, mademoiselle."

"Oh, monsieur, please do not believe that I am as you think."

"Ah, sweet mademoiselle, please do not believe that I am so much the fool as you think. You won't talk?"

"No, monsieur. I—"

Quite before she realized what was happening, she was seized and thrust into her own closet. Everhard slammed the door and turned the key in the lock.

He at once went down to the concierge's little apartment, just inside the wide, cobbled entrance.

Madame Thurot's door was open. She, overflowing the chair, was peeling potatoes in the front room, the better to see every one who passed and to talk of the tragedy.

She laid aside the potato, but gestured with the knife as she clucked sympathetically. It was very like a mother hen welcoming a wet chick under her warm wing.

Everhard gazed at her reproachfully.

"Ah, madame, I thought you were my friend. But, it seems, one should trust nobody."

"*Hé!* What do you say, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame. The woman Houlette is not madame's cousin. No, she can not be, for the woman Houlette has turned out to be a thief."

"Thief? Oh, my God, you say thief!" She lifted her face and thrust up her enormous arms, waving the knife. "Monsieur says that Houlette is a thief!" She groaned loudly.

Everhard smiled.

"Perhaps madame can explain why she told me that this Houlette was a cousin?"

"Why, it was Monsieur Biradou himself—oh, my God, monsieur! What do I say!"

"You but say, madame, that Monsieur Biradou himself asked you to adopt the Houlette as a cousin. And why—why, madame, did Monsieur Biradou say he wanted to put a police spy in my apartment?"

"How wretched I am!" Madame Thurot brandished the knife vaguely.

"Please, madame, do not blame yourself. One can refuse nothing to the police."

"You are kind, monsieur. But they told me it was necessary to watch out for you because in America you had done some things that were not right. I can not believe that, monsieur. You are such a nice gentleman. Even that wretched Houlette has said so."

"Ah, madame, thank you. But you see that possibly they have mistaken me for some one else. In America so many people have the same name and look alike. And you, madame, have been so kind to me that I shall never tell any one that you have confided to me Monsieur Biradou's secret. However, I must let him know that his Houlette is not to be trusted. You see how honest I am, madame, to notify Monsieur Biradou that the spy he has set to watch me is unworthy of his confidence?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur! Every one knows that you are a gentleman."

Her voice was extremely sincere as her pudgy hand closed on the hundred franc note.



RETURNING upstairs, Everhard was near the landing of his own floor when, with a casual lift of his eyes, he saw the black, heavy skirt of a priest. Lifting the glance still higher, he saw that the priest's head was bowed under the broad, flat brim of his hat and that a handkerchief was pressed, as if sorrowfully, against one side of his face. Everhard made way, letting the priest have the inside of the stairs; but when he was one step below, Everhard put out a hand and said—

"Pardon, but let us talk, Monsieur Guyot!"

The handkerchief dropped from the face. The man sucked in his breath with an unpleasant hissing sound. His surprise passed quickly and he said severely:

"Monsieur, I am Père Guyot, and have just visited my unfortunate brother whose life has been unworthy of our parents; and he is now near death."

"How sad."

"If you doubt, monsieur, I shall return with you, and you may ask the sinful woman who calls herself Madame Guyot, who has brought about my brother's ruin."

He again put the handkerchief to his face, sorrowing greatly for the sinful brother.

"Being a wicked woman, Father, she would perhaps lie," Everhard suggested.

"Thank you, monsieur, for understanding my grief."

He made as if to go on, but Everhard caught at his shoulder again, turning him around.

"I must tell you, Father, that I somehow begin to suspect that I know the sinful woman better than I thought I did. You are right; she is very wicked. And understands Russian, does she not? But come, Mademoiselle Houlette is much more to be trusted. Let us talk with her."

"Use caution, monsieur! This is an outrage!"

"I am extremely cautious, Father. Always."

"I am a priest, and the police shall be informed!" Menace came into his tone and look.

"How very well we get on together. I, too, was just thinking that they should be informed."

The befrooked one's black eyes gleamed; the lips curled into a toothy sneer.

"Beware, monsieur!"

"Of what, if you please?"

"I have powerful friends."

"How fortunate you are. But come with me," said Everhard.

The man jumped from under Everhard's hand, starting to run. An agile, wiry fellow who had no doubt often darted away from grasping hands. Now his own hands clutched at the skirts of the heavy gown, lifting it.

In two jumps, Everhard was on him. The barrel of his gun crashed down on the low crown of the broad brimmed black hat. Everhard caught him up before Guyot, unconscious, fell; and, slinging him over a shoulder, he remounted the stairs and entered the apartment.

Everhard let him slide to the floor and searched under the black gown for something oddly lumpish that had pressed when the weight was on his back. A knotted rope was wound about Guyot. Everhard also found a small automatic. Perhaps the fellow would say that he had carried rope and gun into the presence of the sinful brother as symbols of what awaits the wicked if they continue on the wayward path.

Everhard took other things off him too—much money and a few letters, but none of interest; but he found no ring, or anything hinting at *La Tête de Mort*, which was disappointing, since Guyot seemed a smaller fish than Everhard had hoped.

It grew tiresome waiting for him to come around. Everhard suspected that he was shamming, hopeful of a chance to scramble out of the door; so he took Guyot by the feet, dragged him into the kitchen, drew a pan of water and let it go.

He came to life with a splutter of curses, wiping at face and eyes with his sleeve.

"So you are so well known for a rogue," said Everhard, "that you must wear a disguise when the police are on the stairs?"

"You'll pay for this!" the pseudo-priest screamed.

"No doubt. Monsieur Biradou, being an artist, will perhaps never forgive me for humiliating him with the discovery that Kurlingen did not commit suicide, but was murdered!"

"If you know when you are well off, let me go!"

"Stand up."

He arose sullenly.

"Face about."

He sneered, but did as told.

"Move along."

Everhard took him into Houlette's room; stood him before the closet and opened the door.

Houlette peered out, blinking at the light. Her eyes were red and cheeks streaked, but she was not now crying.

"Why, it is Monsieur Guyot!"

She appeared to be surprised that he was in clerical dress.

"I thought so too, and wished your opinion. He appears to have taken holy orders, and now will no doubt stop swearing at Madame Guyot."

Guyot said things that showed he had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

"What can this mean, monsieur?" Houlette asked it as if quite innocently amazed.

"A knotted rope was about his waist. His face not only looks like a monkey's, but he has the same agile body. Since Kurlingen shot himself, no one can doubt that. I guess that Guyot swung down from the window above and gave him the gun. And the whole truth, made-moiselle, is that I think you gave Guyot my gun!"

"As God is sleepless, I did not!"

"The devil is also sleepless, and you did. Back into your closet."

"But, monsieur—"

"Will you deny that you were put in here to spy on me?"

"But I am not a friend to this man!"

She thrust out her long arm at Guyot as if it were a sword.

"Perhaps you will also tell me that you still believe Kurlingen killed himself! Into your closet—and have no fear. I shall notify the great Monsieur Biradou—"

At that Houlette displayed unsuspected emotion. She stared aghast. Tears streamed from her eyes. She lifted an arm pleadingly and let it fall as if aware the gesture would do no good.

"Oh, I am ruined!" She sobbed without shame.

"In you go," said Everhard.

In she went, with the flat of his hand against her shoulder. He shut the door and turned the key.

He looked Guyot over. A bad egg. He had impudence, and no doubt it passed for courage among his friends.

"If you have any lies you'd like to tell, get going," said Everhard. "The closet in my room is quite as strong as this."

"Monsieur," the fellow began glibly, as if talking things over with an equal, "if you are wise, you will have nothing more to do with this affair. The fool police have said suicide. Nothing is to be gained for yourself but trouble if you do not let the matter drop. I am more your friend than you think."

"Ah, yes. You go about making people appear guilty of horrible crimes in order to befriend them. Is that it? Quite an original idea."

"Monsieur, I swear that good was intended for you." Guyot seemed earnest about it, and his eyes blazed hopefully.

"Pah!"

"It is true!"

"You lie."

"No, no! If I were permitted to speak but two words I could make you believe!"

"I give permission. Let us hear the two words."

It was obvious that Guyot was impul-

sively tempted to blurt out something of his secret, but must have remembered that men got their throats cut for less. He shook his head.

"But believe me, monsieur!"

"You pay me the doubtful honor of thinking I am a bigger fool than ever any man thought before."

"And you will be," Guyot said, growing vicious again, "if you meddle with the affairs of my friends by giving me to the police!"

"Yes?"

He had turned sour; looked ugly; sneered—

"I gave you the chance to be on the safe side, so now the devil take you!" He tried to laugh warningly.

"Sounds like a chicken with the pip," said Everhard, and took hold of an ear. "Come along. I have no more time to waste; now that you are to be safely out of the way, I shall visit Madame Guyot. You gave her permission once to entertain me—while you were in England. Now you won't mind, I'm sure."

From what Guyot said, and kept saying even after being put into the closet, together with the way he beat and kicked on the door, it appeared that he did mind.



EVERHARD went to the floor above and rang the bell. In a moment or two he was pleased to hear a honeyed voice say, with just a trace of uncertainty—

"What is it, please?"

Everhard had no great confidence in himself when he tried to pretend to be somebody other than himself; still, one can but try. He tried the tone of the little concierge Thurot, saying—

"A telegram for monsieur."

A bolt slipped. The door opened to a crack's width. A dark eye peeked through—and Everhard's shoulder hit the door.

Pretty little Madame Guyot of the warm, alluring eyes was knocked backward. She cried out vaguely and stag-

gered against the wall behind her.

Everhard went in, kicking the door shut.

She, huddled against the wall with wide spread fingers pressing at arms' length behind her for support, stared and was speechless. She was in lingerie—the merest suggestion of lacy frills, a trace of sheer silk and much perfume.

"Your husband has gone again to England, madame?"

"Monsieur!"

"You have won your bet, madame. You see, here I am in person to thank you for warning me against those dreadful Russians!"

A moment's perplexity shadowed her eyes, and passed. Her lips smiled faintly. With a surely feminine movement she seemed to gather an invisible garment about her, modestly. She took a deep breath hurriedly, and moistened the pretty red lips with a red tongue's tip. She perhaps had not often flirted with poker players; for though she was not without experience and charm, she didn't seem to know quite what to do.

"Ah, monsieur is so clever—" She sighed and smiled, as when one must surrender, trustfully.

"And madame so beautiful and young to be involved in murder."

"Murder!"

"Murder, madame. Your husband, having taken the priest's garb, has just eased his conscience by confession."

"Monsieur misunderstands. I am Mademoiselle Guyot. Monsieur is my brother."

Everhard bowed respectfully.

"You say he—he has confessed? To the police, monsieur?"

"I am not of the police, madame—"

"Mademoiselle, if you please. It is to you he has confessed, monsieur?"

She put out her hand in a timid, trusting gesture.

"And I have locked him in my closet."

"But, monsieur!" Her dainty hands fluttered pleadingly, like little frightened birds looking for a place to light. "The death of such a man is no crime! Be-

sides, I swear I knew nothing of what was intended!"

"You swear it, do you?"

"I swear it. You believe me, dear monsieur? And why try to call it a crime when the police have said it was suicide? Ah, monsieur, be reasonable, please!"

"By all means, madame, do let us be reasonable."

She stamped a silk sheathed, slipped foot.

"Mademoiselle!"

"Monsieur Biradou will know which it is. I shall give you to him."

"Never! I will not go!"

Fifi Guyot was defiant, but not at all ugly about it; and she did not lose a subtly hinted readiness to forgive his bad manners—and stupidity.

"Madame, I shall take you—forcibly, if need be. You may scream. The police will then come more quickly."

Fifi peered and meditated; then, suspiciously submissive:

"You are strong. It shall be as you say. I go now to my room and put on a dress."

"Let us go together."

"Monsieur, you would force yourself into my boudoir!"

"Ah, no; never. But you will invite me. I shall accept. Then you can't possibly be offended, for what man could refuse?"

"Monsieur, you are very clever!"

She went into her room. Everhard paused at the open door and opened his coat, touching the automatic's handle as if to make sure that it was there. He wanted her to see, otherwise it might be like her to snatch up a knife and fly at him.

"Monsieur lacks courage?" she inquired amiably.

"But not caution, madame."

Again the shrug.

"You are stupid and not kind."

She moved gracefully across the room and stopped before a mirror, peered into it, touching her fluffy curls with both hands, and seemed to wonder what was

wrong since he did not notice that she was beautiful.

"Quick, madame."

"Yes, monsieur. You will take me to the police?"

"Of course."

"Monsieur is such an honest man that if he found a nice jewel he would at once take it to the police, eh?"

"Most certainly—if I knew it was phony."

Fifi's staring look broke slowly into a smile, and with a shake of her fluffy head she murmured—

"You believe that of *me*?"

"Oh, come on; hurry up."

She said humbly:

"You are cruel. One were better dead than to hope for kindness from you. You will really take me to the police?"

"Yes."

A long, trembling sigh heaved at her breast. It was such a sigh as had to be seen and heard. She turned with a lingering gaze and went slowly to her closet. She reached up and took down a dress on its hanger, looked at it doubtfully, glanced toward him, and pitched the dress across the bed. She stepped into the closet. Her back was still visible as she reached up, clicking the hangers along the rod, searching. She stepped out of sight.



THERE was a report of a small caliber gun. A sharp, firecracker-like snap of sound.

Her body swayed backward and collapsed inside the closet door, and a little gun of the type made for women's handbags and men's vest pockets fell on the floor just outside the closet door.

"You damn little fool!" said Everhard, and ran to her.

He bent over her, knelt, pulled an arm back, and in the closet dimness stared at the little black powder burned hole in the lacy wisp of a brassière on the left side of her breast. A small red spot lay under the black hole. Her eyes in the unlighted closet were wide as if at the last instant of life she had seen what lay

beyond.

He touched her breast gently with his fingertips—than ran his fingers deep into her soft, curly hair, and arose, pulling.

She squealed with pain. Her hands clutched at his. Her feet flew in scrambling kicks.

"Oh, monsieur, please! You hurt—you hurt me!" She swore at him.

He let go of her hair and she came to her feet like a pretty little animal that wants to fight. He laughed at her and, with a toss of her head, she turned away and went to the mirror.

Fifi Guyot was quite as angry as a pretty hostess detected cheating at cards.

"You palmed that toy cleverly. Permit one who knows something of the art to compliment you."

"The devil take you!"

"You played it so perfectly that I am sure the little trick has taken in many gentlemen, and made them eager to settle with Monsieur Guyot and avoid scandal."

A pair of thoughtful eyes frowned at him. She did not like having her little secrets so well understood.

"If I had run to call the concierge, you would have slipped into a dress and vanished."

Fifi, a little sullenly, busied herself with toilet trinkets, not interested in what he said. No reason for being; he but repeated what she already knew.

"Madame, permit one who knows something of gunshot wounds to offer a little technical advice. I suggest that after you have pulled the brassière aside and shot your blank into it, do not then dab the fake bullet hole on your breast with rouge. Bullet holes are small and black. Also, to attain perfection you must learn that when one has been shot through the heart, the pulse is no longer noticeable. Many gentlemen are too excited at such a time to think of those things, but I didn't want to lose you. And see, a miracle, madame!"

"Mademoiselle," she murmured coolly.

Fifi took up the dress that had been

flung on the bed, slipped it over her head, pulled it down about her hips, shook herself and returned to the mirror. She brushed and fluffed her hair.

She left the mirror and went straight to Everhard, standing close.

"Monsieur," she said sweetly, but with firmness, "I am not going to the police."

"No?"

"No, monsieur. Because to the police I will tell nothing; but to you, I will tell whatever you ask and do whatever you say. I know when I am beaten, monsieur."

"Tell it all."

"All? Everything? All right. You see—" she held out her hand, studying the nails—"when my brother saw you and Kurlingen together in the automobile, he said to me, 'Fifi, now I know how we can kill our enemy, this Kurlingen.' And he told me. But I said, 'No, no! Monsieur Richmond is too charming a man!'" She lifted soft eyes. "You believe me, monsieur?"

"Not a damn word."

She regarded him with pretty insolence, somehow drawing nearer, a yearning promise in her eyes.

"Why was I framed?"

"Do you think I would have let them really find you guilty of murder?"

"How did he get that gun?"

"Through the window, two nights ago. You were not home and the servant was in her room. He took nothing else for fear you would miss things and find the gun gone."

"Such self-control must have pained him greatly."

"Last night it was covered with oiled paper to keep off the rain. It was fired and thrown through the window into the room. Kurlingen was almost in the window when my brother shot him."

"That is all?"

"Everything. Now, please, you tell me why the stupid police called it suicide?"

"You see, Kurlingen, as he was dying, drew his gun and fired. The shot went through the window. His gun fell to the

floor. When I saw two guns on the floor, I simply picked up my own and put it away."

"But I did not hear two shots."

She spoke daintily of murder, quite as untroubled as if she talked of discarding old shoes.

"You are going to hear something now that will interest you, Fifi. Listen. I have talked with Kurlingen. With Mademoiselle Houlette. With your beautiful brother. They have told me things. But I am going to say—and it will be in the papers—that it was the pretty little Fifi Guyot who told me Kurlingen was murdered by La Tête de Mort!"

The blood went out of her face like rouge wiped away. She reached for Everhard, wanting something to hold to, and trying to beg, too.

"You—that? You will do that!" The words were whispered, and strained as if a hand were at her throat. Dark eyes, abjectly frightened, pleaded in terror. "No, no, no, monsieur! Not that!"

"Then come through. Tell it all and I'll cover you up. Otherwise, you haven't a chance."

"But they will kill me!"

Everhard merely shrugged a shoulder—and at that Fifi Guyot broke. Probably for one of the few times in her life she let go of the truth. But even she could name no names. She did not know who had given her and Guyot orders to move into the house, watch Everhard, try what good looks would do toward getting acquainted; but she admitted they came from the Death's Head.

"Didn't my servant give you tips? She was in the game too."

"One doesn't always know who is a friend and who isn't. But the man Kurlingen was picked to die in your room and with your gun. Guyot stole your gun—"

"Being careful to protect my fingerprints?"

"More so to protect his own. And Kurlingen did draw his gun too? How you do have good luck, monsieur."

"Yes, as you say, I do have good luck. You are so pretty and innocent. How was I to know that you really wanted to be friends with me? I could not think that so charming a woman would even pretend to like me."

The next moment Fifi Guyot was hanging on his neck. She, apparently forgiven, started a new deal then and there—as if trying to asphyxiate him with highly scented powder, hectic perfume and flame tipped lips.

He pushed her away gently, saying—

"You are merely pretending now."

She said that she wasn't.

"Prove it, then."

She whispered—

"How?"

"Tell your Tête de Mort—"

"Oh!" She gasped as if soused with icy water.

"—that you and I have become dear friends. You don't greatly love your 'brother,' do you? No, of course not. A brother should not swear at one. Only a lover has such privileges! And, little Fifi, with my technical knowledge of gunshot wounds and your art at suicide—what can we not do together, eh?"

Fifi hastily gathered her jewelry, slipped some filmy things into a light case, tucked the curls under a hat, slipped into her best fur coat, said she had never really loved anybody before, and left the house—carrying a bundle of Everhard's francs.

He did not trust her, but did not greatly care. If she happened to play faithful long enough to go through with a little badger game trap, fine. La Tête de Mort would see whether or not Everhard was a bold, tricky fellow, quite willing to play a dirty game.

CHAPTER XV

VILETTE IS SUSPECTED

AS SOON as Fifi Guyot left the house, Everhard decided that the best thing he could do was to tuck himself away quietly in other quarters for awhile and see how much of a rumpus

Monsieur Biradou kicked up at finding Mademoiselle Houlette and Monsieur Guyot in the closets.

He went to his rooms, took a *pneumatique* out of the table drawer and wrote to Monsieur Biradou at the Prefecture, telling him whom he would find in the closets, and that Guyot had confessed. He said that Mademoiselle Houlette had been more stubborn. He also informed Biradou that urgent business required that he, Everhard, leave at once for Belgium.

Everhard then walked out of the house and at the first tobacconist's mailed the *pneumatique*—which is the same as a special delivery would be in America if special deliveries were delivered with any special alacrity.

He crossed the bridge to the Pont Marie Metro. He knew that he had been followed and shadowed everywhere previously, but did not mean to be today.

At the first subway stop, Everhard, waiting until the train was about to start again, hastily got out. And right at his heels came a little, shopkeeping sort of chap who also lingered on the platform as if he were waiting for the next train.

The next train came. Everhard moved toward the door. So did the shopkeeping chap. They were shoulder to shoulder. Everhard gave him a shove and stepped back. The door closed. The train started up. The shadow was on it, peering back through a window with a look that showed his heart was in his mouth.

Everhard went to the street and took a taxi. He went to Old England, bought a misfit suit of clothes, some pink shirts, purple ties, a cheap suitcase and a pair of glasses.

He changed taxis two or three times, and changed clothes in one of them. When he arrived at a second class *pension* near the Luxembourg, he had an outstretched neck, one shoulder padded higher than the other, and the passport of Harold Robinson, a newspaper corre-

spondent, who spoke French slowly, with difficulty. In filling out the police questionnaire he stated that he had just arrived from Brussels. He went to his room and, after a bath, stayed there, playing solitaire, and cheated shamelessly.

The next morning a slovenly maid came with lukewarm coffee that was half watered milk, stale butter and soggy rolls. He gave the tray one look and said:

"Mademoiselle, I never take breakfast. I am sorry you have been put to this trouble."

She said it was no trouble and that she would speak to the manager, because if one did not take breakfast the tariff would be three francs less per day—

"Which, monsieur, is something."

She went out and fifteen minutes later was back, saying that Monsieur Robinson had been asked for on the telephone.

"Some other Robinson. I'm a stranger."

"Monsieur Harold Robinson, if you please, who arrived yesterday from Brussels."

"Ah, yes. That would be my dear old uncle. Tell him to leave the number, and I'll call."

She went out and Everhard looked thoughtfully at nothing. He felt that somehow he was up a tree. He knew that he had not been followed. How the devil had he been spotted?

The manager came himself, urgently—

"Monsieur, the party holds the line and no one can use the telephone until you have talked."

"Man or woman?"

"Gentleman, monsieur."

Everhard went downstairs to the office and picked up the dangling receiver of the wall telephone.

"Hello?"

A crisp, sharp voice inquired—

"Monsieur Harold Robinson?"

"You've guessed it."

"Monsieur, I wish to thank you for the private communication received yesterday. You are an amazing fellow.

But be careful; be very careful, monsieur. Goodby, monsieur."

"Wait a minute. Who the devil are you?"

"Biradou."

There was a click. Everhard hung up and scratched his lower lip. He saw the manager eyeing him suspiciously, as if about to say something. Everhard beat him to it.

"I'm leaving. Make out my bill. And don't make the customary mistakes. I want three francs off—"

"Impossible! I received no notification until this morning. The tray was served."

"Three francs off!"

"Impossible!"

The preliminary to every good argument in French is for each to repeat the same statement until one of the parties weakens into some sort of variation; then you jump in and talk so fast he can't interrupt. Everhard forgot that he spoke French slowly, with difficulty; and presently a bewildered, sour faced manager rudely thrust out an itemized bill—with three francs deducted for the breakfast—and ten added for a bath.

Everhard grinned and paid without comment.

Changing back into his dark, double breasted suit, Everhard left suitcase and new finery with the slovenly maid as a present to her sweetheart.

Biradou had certainly put the kibosh, and in a hurry, on the plan to stay in hiding for a few days. He had spotted Everhard through the police questionnaire, of course; but how the devil had he known to look out for "Harold Robinson"? Houlette had never opened the envelop. Everhard believed that the only person who knew about his pass-ports was James. Yet Biradou had nailed him.

"That fellow *must* be as smart as he looks," said Everhard.

Anyhow, he had learned in a hurry precisely what he wanted to know; Biradou was not going to make trouble because of what had happened to his

Houlette and to Guyot. And apparently he was not going to injure his own reputation by letting it be known that he had made a mistake about Kurlingen.

"When you play with La Tête de Mort, you do queer things. And I'll bet Biradou is higher up in the game than little Vilette would admit. That warning to be careful, be very careful, has an ominous sound. But damn good advice!"



MADAME THUROT'S big, full moon of a face glowed with news. She gave him a wink that would have cracked a walnut.

"Mademoiselle Houlette's brother has met with an accident and it was necessary for her to return at once to her village. From the tear marks on her face, how she must have loved her brother!"

"So sorry," said Everhard, and returned the wink. "And Monsieur Biradou?"

"Oh, la-la-la! He himself came suddenly and permitted no one to accompany him on the stairs, but took all keys. He returned, holding that Guyot by the arm."

"And Madame Guyot?"

The worthy concierge shrugged her fat shoulders.

"No one has seen her. No honest person, possibly excepting the police, could want to see her—the baggage!"

He found the apartment in a mess. The front room rug was gone; the marks of muddy feet were everywhere; cigaret stubs and ashes all about. He began getting things ready to move for a time into a hotel.

The telephone rang.

"'Allo? Monsieur Richmond? . . . One moment, please."

At the end of several moments another voice came over the wire; and Everhard stiffened a little. This second voice had quality, smoothness, strength; the enunciation was precise, not affected, and was somehow sinister.

"Monsieur Richmond?"

"Yes."

"Will monsieur pardon the impertinence of a personal question?"

"Who's talking?"

"One who unfortunately has not the honor of knowing monsieur. But if monsieur insists upon a name—" He paused, implying that names were plentiful.

"What's the question?"

"Permit me to inquire if Monsieur Richmond does not have in his possession a trifling bit of jewelry that does not belong to him?"

"Just what do you mean?"

"Ah, if monsieur does not understand, then I am answered! He does not have anything that belonged to the man Kurlingen?"

"Oh, you mean that ring?"

"Ah, thank you. You will return it upon demand and accept a slight reward?"

"I suppose so, since as you say, it really isn't mine. But I'd rather pay the reward and keep it."

"Why, monsieur?" The voice was suspicious.

"I look at pictures. I never saw anything finer, merely as art. The ring is fine. The miniature a treasure. There's greatness in it."

"You think it beautiful?"

"What the devil has beauty to do with art?" said Everhard. "And this is art. No greater artist ever lived than the one who got the sweep of a canvas into the space of a centime, and put Kurlingen's portrait there."

"You are enthusiastic?" The voice was not displeased. "Did the man Kurlingen tell you something of this ring?"

"Not a word. I didn't find it until he was dead."

"Ah. The man Kurlingen killed himself?"

"So the police say," Everhard answered promptly.

"And you, monsieur, did not offer the police any suggestions that would give them another opinion?"

"Who the devil are you? And why all

this questioning? I am not in the habit of telling things to strangers, particularly over the phone. Since you have asked about the ring, which I showed to no one and did not mention, you probably have a right to ask questions. But as for anything else, I'm not talking."

"Ah, monsieur chooses to be evasive?"

"You're damn right monsieur does—over the telephone, to a stranger."

The voice laughed a little, slightly amused.

"Thank you, monsieur."

That was all. A click, and the phone was dead.

Everhard frowned and talked silently to himself.

"That's not so good. He's somebody high up in the scheme of things, and more than halfway suspects I'm not on the up-and-up. No, not so good. Still, all art critics have ears like mine—get by, repeating what they've heard. And that fellow sort of liked being told the ring was big time stuff. Maybe I did squirm through—and maybe I didn't."

Everhard asked Madame Thurot to get hold of another servant, male preferred, to put the apartment to rights; that he would return in a few days.

He went to the Hotel Xerich, on the Champs Élysées, and scarcely had time to turn around twice in the two nice rooms and bath, when the office told him that Mademoiselle Jeanne Colbert waited in the lounge.

"Lord, Vilette, you are a fast worker. I just got here myself."

She smiled, not quite happily, gave him her gloved hand; and he, without a flicker, palmed the note she offered.

"Let's sit over there."

She led the way to two chairs side by side.

"You don't look happy, Vilette."

"I am happy enough," she said lightly, tapping his arm. The taps referred to the note he had palmed.

They talked of trifles for awhile, then Everhard mentioned a book he wanted her to read, and went to his room.

He closed the door, stood still and read:

I am suspected. I can't imagine why. They have suddenly stopped letting me learn about anything. I know there are microphones all through my apartment. I can't be sure whether or not they suspect you, too. I was told that you had just arrived here and to come at once. It is because they want to watch us and overhear. I am writing this in the taxi. I can't imagine how you got out of K's murder, but the papers tell me you did. How my father must love you. You must hurry and do something to make them satisfied. Need I remind you that both our lives depend on this being destroyed?

At that, Everhard crumpled the note and walked through the bedroom to the bath. The bathroom door was not quite shut. Somebody was in there. Everhard peered around the edge of the door.

A fellow in the blue shirt and trousers of the porter's staff was on his knees, wiping the clean tile with a clean towel. He grinned humbly and murmured, "Monsieur." A little canvas bag was by his side.

"Please—just a minute," said Everhard, and gestured.

"Yes, monsieur."

The fellow dropped the clean towel over the canvas bag, picked it up and backed out, servilely, peering hard to see if Everhard were suspicious; but he had no way of guessing that Everhard knew porters didn't char in guests' bathrooms.

Everhard closed the door and flushed the note down the toilet.

When he came out the fellow was standing there, patient and incurious, with the canvas bag covered in an accidental sort of way by the towel.

Everhard held out a couple of francs. As the fellow's fingers touched them, one fell to the floor.

"Sorry," said Everhard, and pointed to the coin.

The fellow couldn't ignore it, and so stooped, and Everhard saw why the man was trying so carefully not to turn his back. An electrician's brace and long slender bit—too long to be put into the

little canvas bag—was stuck into the fellow's hip pocket.

Everhard pretended to have noticed nothing, took up a novel he had packed to read himself to sleep, and went to the elevator. He knew very well that, if given half a chance, the electrician's pride in his own cleverness would keep him cocksure; and Everhard thought that on the whole he would rather like having a microphone in his room—just as he liked playing with marked cards when the other fellow didn't suspect that he, Everhard, could read them too.



VILETTE took him into the tea room and, though there were vacant tables, she insisted on sitting down with two other people, already seated.

"It will show that we have nothing to talk of, secretly."

She poured tea. She lifted the cup, offering it, and with no change in tone, as if it were quite a tea table topic, inquired—

"If I lose in the game, will you go on?"

And by losing, she meant being tortured into telling things, then put to death.

He said—

"You think of the nicest things to talk about."

She, knowing that spectators watched, laughed a little, nodded.

"The show must go on, you know."

"I'll probably do whatever I'm told. And by the way, I haven't seen him lately, your father."

She raised her napkin to laughing lips and peered over it, as if half veiled.

"Oh, but indeed you have!"

"Honest?"

"Honest."

"Hmm."

The two women who had been at the table when they sat down arose, and a man and woman at once took their places. Vilette's small foot dropped on Everhard's toe, warningly. The next instant she began to speak cheerfully of how very much she needed money.

The Hotel Xerich enclosed an arcade lined with small exclusive shops. After tea they strolled along, looking into windows.

She led Everhard into a glove shop that was empty except for a highly rouged saleslady.

Two minutes later in came a spruce little man who explained that he was in no hurry, but wished to make a selection for his wife. He sat down.

Everhard moved his foot out of the way as Vilette's toe reached for it. She, with no hurry at all, tried on gloves, examined only the most costly, and concluded by ordering two dozen pair. The saleslady almost embraced her; but the saleslady's admiration soared skyward when Vilette, opening her purse, shook her head, and asked Everhard if he would mind lending her the money. Nice shopping technique. The spruce little man would have something to tell.

In the arcade Vilette murmured teasingly:

"I have let you down easily. As a usual thing, I take my admirers into a jewelry store." Then quickly, "No matter what may happen to me, they must not suspect you!"

"Listen, Vilette. If I can get Hoven-den in a hole, will it be all right with—you know?"

"If it's cleverly done," she said quickly.

Everhard went to his rooms and looked into the bathroom to see if anybody else, surprised by his return, had withdrawn there to hide. He also looked, without much interest, to see if any particles of plaster would disclose the position of the microphone, and found none. Then he winked at the wall, took the telephone book, and called up a business house that did a lot of exporting.

A woman fussed excitedly when he began to talk, but lapsed into disgruntled silence as he said sternly:

"Please listen and do as I tell you. Even if you don't understand, other people will. Tell Kiro to notify the party at Washington that our soap is

on the way. Tell Kiro to tell him that if he goes to sleep on the job again and lets the stuff be grabbed by the customs, he'll have to pay it out of his own private account. Tell Kiro to get me some money, quick. I don't care how he gets it. I can't wait for the soap to be sold. That's all."

He hung up while the distracted woman was imploring him to believe that she did not know Monsieur Kiro; which wasn't odd in view of the fact that Everhard had never heard of the gentleman either.

Everhard paced the room awhile to sound nervous, then called the Horse-shoe Club and left word for Nick Dodalus to telephone him.

An hour later Dodalus rang up, eager and sympathetic. He had tried all day to reach Everhard at the apartment but was told there was no such number.

"You must've got it down wrong," said Everhard.

Dodalus wanted to talk of Kurlingen's death; but Everhard said—

"Nick, I'm in a hole and need money, quick."

"How much?"

"A million francs."

The business man under the Greek's skin grunted. A million francs was \$40,000 and that is a lot of money—in business. Dodalus often tossed that much into a poker pot just to see if anybody had the nerve to call him. That was sport.

"Come down to the club and we'll talk it over," he said.

"Can't. Have to stay in my room for a call."

Everhard hung up, satisfied that the microphonic listener would understand that he was in pressing need of money.

He was dressing for dinner when there was a heavy knock on the door.

"Come in," Everhard called.

Nick Dodalus came waddling in with a fresh unlighted cigar in his be-diamonded fingers.

"Lo!" he said, and tossed his hat at the table.

He had match and match box in his hands, but before lighting his cigar he reached into an inside pocket and dropped a pad of crisp banknotes on the table, pointed at them with unlighted cigar and eyed Everhard from under drowsy lids.

"There you are."

"Nick, how the hell did you ever get rich?"

He grinned.

"'Cause when I'm being a sucker, I know it. In business I ain't no sucker." Thick lips drew on the cigar.

"And you're not even going to ask me what I want it for!"

"Hell, no!"

"I'll tell you anyhow. A friend of mine is up against it for cash. She's perfectly all right, but you know how shopkeepers are."

"That De Nevers?"

"She's all right, Nick. I know women and—"

"You do like hell. She's bad. I've already told you. No shopkeeper'll ever get a look at that. And you'll never get a centime back. She's cold and hard as ice."

"And lovely as a dream, Nick."

"She'll bleed you to death," the Greek warned. As he was leaving, he said, "I'm going to Cairo. Business. But I'll give myself a little birthday party for a send-off. You'll come?"

"If I have to crawl. And pay this back. When is the party?"

A fat hand moved indifferently toward the notes.

"Pay it into Barclay's. To my account. Any time. Party'll be in about a week. Don't know just yet."

"How old, Nick?"

Dodalus swore, amused.

"Don't know. Not when I was born or where. But if I want to celebrate, I say maybe it really is my birthday. And who the hell knows but maybe it is?"

After the Greek left, Everhard eyed the money. He turned it over, pitched it aside, and picked it up again, brooding. Then he said—

"I'll take a chance!"

He called the hotel office and asked for a messenger who could be trusted. He was offered a page, a porter, a clerk; but turned thumbs down, explaining that the package he wanted delivered was valuable. A house detective then came to the room, and took the package containing one million francs. His instructions were to take it to Mademoiselle Jeanne Colbert, deliver it in person and get a receipt.

"That ought to put it over that she's working her vamp racket hard," said Everhard to himself. "But if anybody thinks I'd give up forty thousand dollars to any woman, they're crazy. The Death's Headers themselves have got to pay me back—or rather Dodalus. That is, unless little Fifi forgot her promise. We'll soon see." He added, "I should have found out first."

He dressed for dinner, went to a booth phone and called the number at which Fifi Guyot had promised to leave the address of her new apartment.

"Fourteen, Place Cercle, monsieur," said a sweet, understanding voice.

CHAPTER XVI

EVERHARD SETS A TRAP

EVERHARD went at once to No. 14 Place Cercle. The old concierge said Mademoiselle Guyot was in, and had such a wise look in his eyes that Everhard at once confirmed his suspicion as to who was paying for the apartment and dug into his pocket.

Fifi was almost ready to go out to dinner, she said; but looked rather as if she meant to go to a ball after the dinner. She did not have quite the true Parisienne's restraint when it came to making herself look attractive; but she did have charm of a certain kind—as strong and noticeable as her perfume.

Fifi threw herself at Everhard quite as if she loved him. Her honeyed voice said she had been afraid he would forget her.

"No chance. Besides, we need the money. Stage set?"

"I have the most charming little apartment. So discreet!"

She took his hand, leading him about the rooms.

"Has any one been near you, with questions about the Kurlingen affair?"

"No, monsieur." She shook her curly head and stared as innocently as if telling the truth. "Not yet."

"And what did you tell them—over the telephone?"

"Oh, exactly what you told me I was to say, monsieur." In a hasty, frightened whisper, "I do not dare deceive you, for then you would say that I had told you of—" her voice trailed off almost inaudibly—"the Death's Head."

"True, Fifi. One peep, and I'll throw you overboard. So you said Kurlingen had not died at once, but drew his gun and fired through the window?"

"Yes; and that when you ran in you saw the rope dangle across your window, and so guessed at once that Guyot had killed him."

"And that I, having had much trouble with the police in my own country and elsewhere, do not readily tell them things?"

Fifi nodded.

"Yes, because when you had put away your own gun which Guyot had thrown into the window, you knew the police would have to think that it was suicide. And that is the truth, isn't it?"

"Near enough. You explained that I then waited for Guyot, caught him in priest's dress, that he tried to threaten me, so I slammed him into a closet—and talked with you?"

"Yes, monsieur. That is just what I said. And that you and I right away became such good friends. And because you did not want that wretched Guyot to annoy me any more, you wrote Monsieur Biradou just what had happened and—"

"Not quite, Fifi. I did not mention La Tête de Mort."

"Oh, I know that!" she said quickly,

uneasily. The very name made her shudder. "But I do not understand why the police have done nothing about it?"

Everhard looked mystified too; but he understood, or thought he did, why Biradou was as disappointed as any one that Kurlingen had seemed to commit suicide; and why Biradou wanted to protect Guyot, or else quietly to punish him for having bungled. Fifi, of course, being a very small pawn in the game, would know nothing of Biradou's connection with La Tête de Mort.

"But the party on the telephone," Everhard suggested, "quite readily understood why you and I became friends almost at once?"

Fifi smiled brightly, nodding. She felt there could be no mystery as to why any man should love her.

"Are you afraid of big game, Fifi?"

"Not if you are with me."

"I'll be on the job. And, my child, if you don't go through with it, I'll break your neck—or make you wish I had. Go through with it, and I'll save your soul—what's left of it."

Fifi cooed warmly:

"I would do anything for you. And have you found a nice man to be my friend?"

"Not yet. But I'll pick him out. Tonight, if I can."

"Where do I meet him—this nice man you are to find for me?"

"I'll spot him. Then telephone you where to go, and make eyes at him. Probably pick an American. Easily scared, Americans. I know, being one. Somebody with jewelry on him. And if you don't want to go through with it, now is the time to say no."

"Please, I say yes."

"Understand though that if you weaken you are all through—in every way."

"Do you think I am weak?" she asked coquettishly. "I will show you!"

Everhard took her to dinner, fed her well, was attentive and seemed charmed; but it amused him to think of the expression that would be on her pretty, vain face when she learned that he had

used her as a catspaw to get money to give to that notorious vampire, Isobel de Nevers.

Fifi did not want to go back to the apartment and wait alone. But Everhard insisted. She did not like not having her own way, but she did rather like the feeling that he was her master.

"If you sit around in a café," he explained, "you'll have a lot of useless fellows trying to flirt with you. You stick right in the apartment till I telephone you where to go and whom to smile at. Understand?"

"Yes, darling."



EVERHARD, being in need of a suitable messenger, thought he stood the best chance of finding the man he wanted among the art students. They are often reckless young scapegraces, usually in need of money, impudent and venturesome.

He went to a noisy little café near the Dôme, looked about, and went away. He visited three or four before he spotted a moody young man whose face he liked, and whose eyes had the downcast hopelessness that reflects empty pockets.

"May I sit here?" Everhard inquired.

"Certainly," said the young man, politely but with no graciousness.

They talked. Everhard bought drinks and cigarets, studied the youth's face critically, then said:

"I am a stranger to this part of the city and am rather in need of an artist."

"What kind of work, if you please?"

"Really rather more of an actor than a painter."

"Ha!" said the young man, suddenly a-bubble with good spirits. "I have proved myself a great actor. For three weeks I have made my landlady believe that the next day I would have money. And if you knew my landlady, you would know that is a great achievement!"

Everhard evasively explained that he wanted to get a certain message to a certain man; and offered a fair sum as

advance payment.

The youth crushed out his cigaret.

"And have we got time for me to eat? I vaguely remember that it used to be good fun—eating!"

He ate—joyously—and drank champagne.

Then they took a taxi and began scouting. It was about eleven o'clock. Hovenden was not at the Horseshoe, and Everhard knew that it was too early for him to be at any of the night clubs he frequented. They changed taxis often so no one driver would have a chance to learn too much.

The youth, whose name was Charles—he was twenty-three—passed the time happily, telling Everhard the history of his life, his dreams of the future; dreams that rejoiced at the wretched humiliation of art committees who were to die miserably of chagrin because they had failed to recognize his early genius . . .

By repeatedly telephoning, Everhard learned when Hovenden arrived at the club.

Charles pulled his hat down firmly, buttoned his coat, shook hands with Everhard, nervously unbuttoned his coat, said, "You'll see!" and went into the club entrance.

He told the doorman that he had an imperative message for Hovenden. He told the guardian of the inner portal the same, and was scrutinized with disfavor but told to wait. The guardian disappeared and returned alone.

"The prince asks me to take the message, if you please."

"I was told to give it in person, privately, monsieur. I know nothing of what it really means, but was paid well to promise I would do as told. And my promise is sacred, monsieur. Always, monsieur!"

The guardian grumbled and went away again. He returned and beckoned.

In the lounge Charles was taken to a tall man who stood waiting.

"Monsieur Hovenden?"

Hovenden, with aloof dignity and suspicion, nodded rigidly.

"Monsieur, not an hour ago as I was passing along the street a very fine automobile swung to the curb. A man called to me. When I stepped near, he said, 'You are Jean Tillier, are you not?' I said, 'No, monsieur. I am François Vernon.' 'The devil,' he said, 'but how you resemble Tillier. I have no time to lose, and will you take a message as I tell you?' He thrust out all this money, monsieur!" Charles showed a fistful of franc notes. "Then he took off his glove and drew a ring from his pocket, and showed it to me. A curious ring, with a skull's face. He flipped up the face so that I could see—"

"Yes, quickly! What else?" said Hovenden, impatiently interested.

"Yes, monsieur. He said that I should first tell you of the ring. Then he said I was to tell you that the previous messenger was struck in the street by an automobile and taken to the hospital. That is why the message has been delayed. He said he had mistaken me for a man known to him, but for this one time I would do as well as another if I repeated everything precisely as told."

"The message, you stupid!" said Hovenden, growing nervous.

"Yes, monsieur. I was to come here and say to you in person and alone—he described you as tall, very handsome, with keen eyes and the look of a man who understood quickly! He made me repeat the message three times to make sure I had it perfectly. It is this: 'The man Richmond has taken up with Madame Guyot, who is well known to us. He has also just made a very expensive present to a certain woman who is well known to you, monsieur. Madame Guyot's new apartment is at No. 14 Place Cercle, second floor, front, where she is now alone. Some one—' he said you would understand at once who is meant—'has instructed you to go at

once and question the Guyot woman so that we may learn more particularly why the affair with the man K. was unsuccessful.'

"That is all, monsieur."

"Here," said Hovenden, "is a little something to help you forget that you have ever spoken with me."

"Thank you, monsieur," said Charles.

He left the club at once, came to where Everhard waited at the corner, quickly told how the thing went; then went his way happily with enough in his pocket to appease the landlady for months to come.

Everhard had looked about until he found Hovenden's limousine; and, watching from across the street, saw Hovenden come, speak to the chauffeur who held the door open, and drive away.

Three minutes later Everhard found a taxi and followed, getting out a block away from Fifi Guyot's address. He looked, but did not see Hovenden's car, and rather wondered if there had been a slip-up.

But the look of the concierge, blowsy with sleep, made Everhard quite well understand that another gentleman had just gone up the stairs. The concierge gazed at the stairs unhappily, then shrugged his shoulders.

Everhard mounted the two flights rapidly, rose to his tiptoes in the hall, hurried forward and bent an ear to the apartment door. He heard Fifi's low, excited voice, but not what she said. It would not do to leave her alone very long with Hovenden.

Everhard withdrew some twenty feet, walked briskly to the door and knocked lightly. It was only because he listened intently that he heard a muffled flutter of hasty movement. He knocked again, impatiently. No answer. Then, like one who has rights, he tried the door, shaking it. No answer. He put a finger on the bell.

TO BE CONTINUED

The CAMP-FIRE



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readers, writers and adventurers*

A NOTE from Stephen Allen Reynolds, in connection with his novellette, "An Errand to the Barrens," in this issue:

Carmel, California

Greetings! Perhaps some of you old-timers will remember when I contributed more frequently to *Adventure*. Now I'm located in California, where, looking over my backyard fence, a spur of the Sierra Madre range cuts off the hot valleys beyond. Whales, mostly finbacks, play in my front yard—the well known Pacific Ocean.

In connection with whales and ambergris, dealt with in my current story "An Errand to the Barrens," I would say that it's a matter of record that sperm whales have been taken off the Labrador Coast. Grenfell, in his authoritative work, speaks of several instances. No doubt the mammals loafed along in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream until they'd got farther northward than they intended. It's not bending the long bow too much to imagine a sick sperm-whale dashing out

of the warm Gulf Stream and frantically working its way through Hudson Strait into the Bay proper. Of course the whale had to be of the cachalot (sperm) variety, for that's the only species in which ambergris is found.

It was my privilege while on a whaling voyage to the Arctic to meet scores of experienced whalers. From their tales of ambergris, and quite apart from any scientific printed matter on the subject, I'm convinced that ambergris is nothing more or less than the concentrated "baked" fecal matter adhering to and clogging the bowels of a whale. The proof would seem to lie in the fact that the precious gum is never found in a healthy whale covered with a normal thickness of blubber. So it used to be the practise, time and weather permitting, for the men to open up sluggish and thin-blubbered sperm-whales, more particularly those found dead and floating in the water. This involved a considerable amount of extra work, for once the blubber was stripped from the whales it was customary to turn the carcasses adrift. After hours of arduous chopping with razor edged

long-handled spades, ambergris might be found every hundredth time—perhaps five pounds, perhaps two or three hundred.

MY OWN particular theory as to the formation of ambergris is that the “beaks” or “claws” lining the rims of the suckers on the tentacles of the enormous cuttlefish on which the sperm-whale feeds are indigestible, and that sooner or later they hook and catch in the bowel of the whale, forming at first a physical stoppage, which later festers and undergoes certain chemical changes of which I know nothing. I do know however that the carcass of a dead whale will swell to the size of a two-story house, and that if a hot sun continues playing on it the gas generated will puff it into the size of a three-story house. Before it reaches the height of the Empire State building it bursts. The bones and meat sink. If ambergris be dislodged, it will float and perhaps be cast up on a beach. The ambergris isn't particular about the beach. It's been found in the Seychelles, the Azores, and at Coney Island. And to touch again on “bursting” whales, I'm moved to say that such explosions can be smelled for miles in all directions.

The machine-gun mentioned in the story is a comparatively new device manufactured by the Auto Ordnance Company of New York. It has no water-cooling attachment, hence would overheat and become useless for continued firing in actual warfare. But it (the Thompson .45), is light, extremely portable, and so is valuable for police purposes. It may be used as a single-shot rifle, and held to the shoulder like other rifles, but the most effective way of using it is to hold it by the double grips level with the hips, the eye on the target. The “burst” is commenced and the body of the marksman swings from the hips, both arms being rigid.

Three types of magazines are furnished for this weapon: X, L and C, holding respectively ten, fifty and one hundred rounds. There is very little trajectory up to five hundred yards, but at two hundred it's perhaps the deadliest little machine-gun known. In most States, including California, it's a penitentiary offense to be in possession of such a gun.

—STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS

And speaking of whales, here's an interesting bit from a report by the Bureau of Fisheries, sent on to the “Fire” by Victor Shaw:

“The Bureau of Fisheries reports that the 355 whales taken in Alaskan waters by two whaling stations during 1930 yielded products worth \$470,265, making the value of each whale more than \$1,300. Whale oil, sperm oil, fertilizer, pickled meat and whale bone were the commodities secured from the animals, says the report. The

section of the report which deals with Alaskan whaling follows:

“The Port Hobron and Akutan stations of the American Pacific Whaling Company were again operated in 1930. Seven steam whalers were used, and employment was given to 190 whites, 14 natives, and two Japanese—a total of 206, or a decrease of 27 from the number reported employed in the industry in the previous year. The whales taken consisted of 50 finbacks, 191 humpbacks, 76 sulphur bottoms, and 36 sperm-whales. This is a decrease of 30 from the number taken in Alaskan waters in 1929.

“The products of the whale fishery consisted of 816,700 gallons of whale oil, valued at \$371,272; 121,150 gallons of sperm oil, valued at \$45,431; 815 tons of fertilizer from meat, valued at \$40,750; 355 tons of bone fertilizer, valued at \$10,650; 37,000 pounds of pickled meat valued at \$1,850; and 5,600 pounds of whale bone, valued at \$308—a total value of products of \$470,265 and a decrease of 6% from 1929 when products were valued at \$502,081.”



A COMRADE regrets the anonymity of various horses that have contributed to the making of frontier history, and whose strains are passing from our knowledge because of inadequate records of their careers:

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

“Today's Raw Bronc”, as told by Gil Strick to Alan LeMay in *Adventure* for March 1, 1932, opens an outdoor subject on which its ramifications I hope to read much more from men of the manifest authority of Gil Strick. Take the horse out of our past and our present and conjure the result. How little can we find in the history of our frontiers of the actual equine heroes, their origins and their identities! Room here for the talents of a LeMay or the researches of a Pen-dexter.

More than ten years ago I sent to Camp-fire the story of a horse and his frontier origins, with the suggestion of using the original—a young stallion—as a contribution in carrying on of a vanishing tribe. Publication delayed, he was gelded before inquiries from remote ranches poured in. He traced direct in line, color, form and temper to one of the almost legendary “pacing mustang” wild herd leaders. And for what he is and what he has done in the intervening years, horsemen lament that he is not entire. I write now because he is not the last of the race, and constantly I hope that more will become history than the little I have learned concerning the golden stallion of the Canadian river country, who after much hunting was “creased” and captured, and who founded

the "Kit Carson" family. The animal of which I write has written his record indelibly, so that his story is not one of adjectives. Other horses have done likewise, and the history of road and plain will be richer if here and there the part played by such as they is recorded as the part of simply "a horse".

FOR want of such records, whole families of great value have disappeared. The Narragansett pacer, swiftest and best riding horse of Colonial days is now known of man as little as the carrier pigeon of the same day and later; and likewise are lost the Cockspurs, the Copperbottoms, the Travelers and other great strains; while only in the memories of a few patriarchs remain various individuals that have made local history in the last half century, and whose names and blood might well be carried on in perpetuity.

Horses of the running and harness tracks and horses of the show rings are registered and their deeds recorded, but the great riding horses of the open spaces customarily are unsung and unhonored save for some weak tribute to "the gallant bay", "the great black stallion", "the swift gray mare".

—R. T. M. MCCREADY



MANY others of you, besides Talbot Mundy, have brought to the Camp-fire strange tales of the amazing curative powers exhibited by "medicine men" and witch doctors of various primitive tribes you have visited. Unexplained, and quite likely unexplainable, cures have been effected by what the uninitiate might disparagingly term mumbo-jumbo or paltry magic, but which not a few have asserted were in reality based on a profound knowledge, on the part of these native practitioners, of the physical and psychological processes of the human being.

Also, the question has often been put, how about other cures, apart from those of a seemingly miraculous nature? The secret, for instance, of certain substances almost specific for certain kinds of disease—such as decoctions of the skins of toads (containing iodine) long used among some tribes in goitre treatment; solutions made from cinchona bark (yielding aspirin) employed by others in alleviating fever; and so on? Purely

accidental and unrelated discovery? Or the relics of a comprehensive, well developed body of medical science that once dignified a flourishing race?

As far as the inferences to be drawn are concerned, the theory which a reader quotes in the following letter might, it seems, be applied as well to the effective therapeutics of a devil-devil doctor of the Amazon Basin as to those of a *bwana maganga* of German East Africa:

Liberty, New York

I was particularly interested in Talbot Mundy's reminiscences of Africa entitled "A Jungle Sage", in the March 15th *Adventure*. The statement concerning the witch doctors, "that such people belonged to days gone by," caught my eye.

This statement reminded me of a series of articles written by René Thevenin, a French scientist, for a weekly magazine, in which he discussed the origins of our present science. In one of these articles Professor Thevenin made the statement that the black race was not a young race, but was a very old one, which was in the process of a far advanced decay. At their zenith, according to Thevenin, the blacks had possessed a superior civilization. It may well be that these African witch doctors, of whose powers Talbot Mundy speaks, are the possessors of some remnants of a superior healing art, remnants which are perhaps the sole indication today of the probable past greatness of the black race.

THE method of reducing fever by means of damp cloths, used in the story by Oketch the Rainmaker, is known to white men. This is what is known as "cold packs", and is known to chiropractors, osteopaths, naturopaths and also members of the regular school of medicine, and was originated, I believe, by an Austrian whose name, as near as I can remember, was Priesnitz. It was from the teachings of Priesnitz that Father Sebastian Kneip, a famous German hydrotherapist, developed his method of healing disease mainly by the use of water. Where Oketch got his cold packs from, I do not know. Some might say from missionaries; but setting broken bones merely by pressing on certain nerves is something else again. Such procedure would require knowledge of anatomy of a high order. I am not prepared to state that setting broken bones by nerve pressure is known to white surgeons.

Mr. Mundy's account of the cures wrought by these witch doctors lends color to the statement made above, that these individuals possess information which has come down to them out of a possible glorious past of the race.

—A. GEORGE



ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Cold NOTES on freezing to death.

Request:—"At what low temperature will a healthy human being freeze to death, and how long does the process take? It is assumed that the victim is sitting or lying on the ground and makes no effort to combat the cold.

Is freezing a painful death, and is the approach of death realized by the victim?"

—A. COLTON, Prince Rupert, British Columbia

Reply, by Dr. Claude P. Fordyce:—Authorities agree that the time occupied in the freezing process varies, depending on such factors as the vigor of the constitution of the victim, his age, body protection and the temperature of exposure.

Usually several hours are necessary. The combined effect of cold air and dampness is more marked than that of cold dry air.

If the victim is lying quiet and taking no exercise to maintain metabolism and heat production the process will be but a few hours. Freezing is not regarded generally as a painful death, as the patient goes into a coma with a loss of sensibility prior to stoppage of vital processes. Death approach is not realized by the victim.

Sea EMERGENCY rations for a Gulf Stream fisherman.

Request:—"What kind of food and amount would you advise me to carry on my 28-foot boat for emergency?"

This is a motor boat, and I will use it for fishing in the Gulf Stream from Molasses to Alligator Reef. I go out from Plantation Key each day.

There are 4 of us on each trip, and we have been using this boat for the last two Winters and have had no trouble with the motor; but I want

to have some food on hand in case of trouble."

—CHAS. DU BELL, Camden, New Jersey

Reply, by Captain Dingle:—Since you require only emergency rations in a small craft, you won't need stores which have to be prepared. The chief item is, of course, water—and you should be scrupulous about that. Carry just twice as much as you decide is proper, and never under any circumstances neglect to replenish it at regular intervals, whether used or not. I should have said *change* it too.

The best emergency food is hardtack—Army or sea biscuit—in airtight tins, and raisins, also protected from damp. If you have a store of these items you can get along for several days if necessary. If you must have meat, chipped beef, in tins or glass, is about the most nourishment in least space of all the common foods. The minimum I would suggest is four hardtack and four ounces of raisins per man per day, and, for the locality you use, at least one quart of water. After all, the chief thing is that one man has charge of stores, and has guts enough to stick to schedule and make his companions do so too.

Africa BATTERY for the Congo.

Request:—"A friend and I have traveled close to 3000 miles through Central America without a guide. We had some tough times, but it all came out in the wash. We are thinking of traveling the same way across Africa, preferably from West to East. What sort of firearms would you recommend?"

—M. V. GRINSTAD, Mishawaka, Indiana

Reply, by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler:—I shall do my best in helping you to cross the continent from West to East, though the trip would be more practical if made from the East

to the West; however, that is for you to decide.

The route most travelers prefer going from West to East is to land at Matadi, the harbor on the Congo River.

Equip yourself with whatever your former experiences have proved desirable in Matadi to go by train to Kinshasa and embark on one of the 200 steam vessels, ascending the Congo River until you arrive at Kabalo. Take train to Albertville on Lake Tanganyika, cross the lake by steamer to Kigambo in former German East Africa, now Tanganyika, whence the railroad will get you to Dar-es-Salaam on Africa's East Coast.

You can, of course, make stops at any port on the Congo for any length of time or purpose, but, when you do, always consult the proper Government Official as to hunting, licenses, etc. to avoid trouble, since every province of the Congo Free State issues its own licenses that are void beyond its borders. A license to cover the entire Congo costs 5000 francs.

Do not carry any .303 or .450 and .455 rifles (the latter of British Army pattern) revolvers or pistols; the first are prohibited in the Sudan, should you decide to swing in that direction; the others are prohibited in almost any part of British East Africa.

Battery: Possibly the best all-around battery for Africa would be somewhat as follows: A good, heavy-bore Express, not under .450, a 9mm. Mauser and a long-range shotgun (repeater); add to this a 9 mm. Mauser automatic, all except the pistol provided with telescopic sights. For elephants, rhino and hippo the .577 or .600 bores are the best, but heavy to carry around (16 lbs.). Use hard nose bullets with these, and *smokeless* powder. Many lives have been lost, owing to the dense smoke from black powder acting as a screen to a charging animal and preventing a second shot. These large bores are practically the only guns that will stop a charging animal.

Hoover Dam

EX-SERVICE men are given preference.

Request:—"I would be very grateful for any information that you could give me on working conditions on the 'Hoover Dam.'"

I am a carpenter able to do almost any kind of work, and have been around the country several times, but I would like to know a little about work and chances before I come out there."

—JOHN VAN SCHAİK, JR, Paterson, New Jersey

Reply, by Mr. F. W. Egelston:—On January 31 there were 4087 applications for the month for work on file at the Federal employment office at Las Vegas. Up to February 20, 917 more had been received. In addition to these applications, made in person, 35,000 letters of inquiry had been received.

There are now (March 4) 3700 men working in all departments under the various projects now

under actual construction—Boulder City, diversion tunnels, etc. This force is due to be reduced soon. The labor turnover averages 600 per month, vacancies being filled from applications on file at the Las Vegas employment office from men actually on the ground. Ex-service men are given preference.

The above facts were obtained from A. L. Cross, Federal Director of Employment for Nevada, and are official.

Great Lakes

CHARTS; pilot and channel rules.

Request:—"Will you please send me a map of the Great Lakes showing the shoal lights and material on seamanship, laws and penalties."

—NORMAN PALMETER, Vassar, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. H. C. Gardner:—A complete chart of the chain of Lakes will cost you 35c and can be obtained by writing the Locks Office, Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., and enclosing this amount.

Write the Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., for "The Pilot Rules and Regulations of the Great Lakes"; a copy form 18 rule V; and a copy of "The Channel Rules and Regulations."

Fencing

OLYMPIC, and other, champions.

Request:—"1. As one interested in a general way, but knowing nothing about it, the enclosed clipping, concerning Miss Dorothy Jordan, the movie actress, gives me an excuse to drop you a line. It states that she is a champion fencer. What is her fencing record?"

2. What provision is made for selecting and training the candidates for the American Olympic fencing team, both male and female? Who are they?"

—T. S. JEWETT, JR, Kansas City, Missouri

Reply, by Capt. Jean V. Grombach:—1. First, as you well know, the expression "champion" is a relative one, especially in publicity. I have no doubt that Dorothy Jordan is an excellent fencer, probably a champion in the movie colony or perhaps has won honors unknown to me. However, the records of the Amateur Fencers' League of America with regard to U. S. National Championships, senior, junior and novice, do not disclose the name of Miss Jordan.

2. There is a United States Olympic fencing squad of about 12 men in each weapon—foil, épée and saber—now training for the games in 1932. From this squad a team of about four per weapon will be chosen. The selection will be based on tryouts held every few weeks, also on the results of this year's National Championships.

I will send you a list of the Olympic squad by weapons in the near future.

Dog

TEACHING a grown dog new tricks.

Request:—"I have a collie dog, aged one year and a half. He has never been trained. How can I make him obey?"

—KENNETH LOWELL, Windham, New York

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—Use a leash about ten feet long; snap it to the dog's collar. When you want him to come in, the instant he gets to the end of the lead, jerk him in, uttering the command, "Come in." To drop, utter the word, "Drop," take hold of the lead close to his collar, pinch his hind quarters and force him down. To heel, use the word, "Heel," and every time he advances in front of you, switch him back with the end of the lead. After you teach these commands, you can teach him almost anything, provided you do not lose your temper and are willing to give fifteen minutes each day to the task.

Yerba Mate

SOUTH AMERICA'S own beverage.

Request:—"Are the tea leaves for *yerba mate* sun or air dried, or are they baked or smoke cured?"

—E. ZANTOW, Bettendorf, Iowa

Reply, by Dr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—*Mate* is prepared as follows. The leaves are first dried over a fire, then placed over a dome improvised from saplings and heated by flues from surrounding fires. After 24 hours the *yerba* is ready for rough crushing by tree roots used as flails. Leaves are then bagged.

Mate is the name of the gourd they use for steeping the tea. The gourds are very ordinary small plants of the pumpkin, or squash, families; very much smaller of course.

Coyote Bait

A MIXTURE you wouldn't want to eat by mistake.

Request:—"Can you give me a formula for making lures or scents for coyote bait?"

—WILBER H. HILL, Colton, California

Reply, by Mr. Raymond S. Spears:—Here is a formula that is used successfully by many trappers: 1 oz. oil of cumin; 1 oz. oil of rhodium; ½ oz. asafetida, grated; wart of horse, size of hickory nut, grated. Alcohol to cut and make compound to consistency of dough. Place in wide necked bottle, keep corked. Use in two or three weeks. Smear small quantity close to traps on some stick or bush.

Fish oil is also an excellent bait.

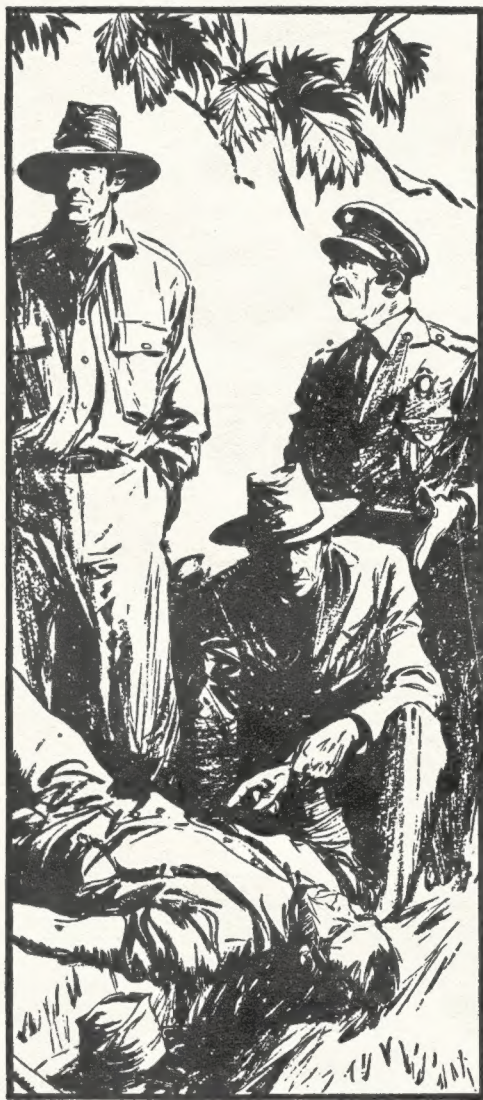
Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and full postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*, JUNE 15th



RIVER PICK-UP

*An absorbing murder
mystery among the
banana farms of
Central America*

By

L. G. BLOCHMAN

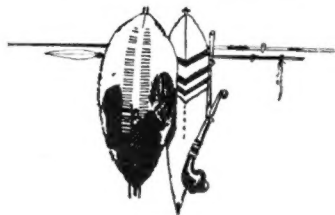


*And These Other
Fine Stories*

GRATITUDE, a story of the sea, by F. R. BUCKLEY; CITIZEN FOUCHÉ, a story of the days of Napoleon, by ARED WHITE; THE BOX, a novelette of the South Sea Islands, by BASIL CAREY; the second half of THE

WHITE SQUADRON, a novel of the Saharan Camel Corps, by JOSEPH PEYRÉ; TOW TARGET, a story of the U. S. flyers, by ANDREW A. CAFFREY; THE GENTLEMAN BRUISER, a story of bare-knuckle pugilism, by DONALD BARR CHIDSEY; NUMBER ONE BOY, a timely article on China, by JAMES W. BENNETT; THE CZAR OF ALL THE RUSSIANS, a story of the False Dmitri, by NATALIE B. SOKOLOFF; and Part V of THE DEVIL'S PASSPORT, a novel of the Paris Underworld, by GORDON YOUNG.

ROBERT SIMPSON



• **F**rom the highlands of Scotland and a law office to the palm oil trading beaches of West Africa, on the Niger River and the Slave Coast of the ill-reputed "White Man's Grave," seems an incredibly far cry . . . No radios, no motion picture cameras, no automobiles, no sanitation, screen doors and windows considered namby-pamby, human sacrifices still the order of the day. Then off to the Slave Kingdom of Benin on a mahogany concession . . . where mighty few men made a second trip and lived . . . still fewer a third trip. Out of seven who chummed together on the trading beach at Warri, Simpson was the only one left less than three months after saying farewell to the Niger for good . . . What a background from which to draw his magnificent tales of the African Coast . . . the "White Man's Grave!" Little wonder that his novels, "Calvert of Allobar" and "The Grey Charteris" are generally conceded to be two of the greatest romantic novels of Africa.



If Robert Simpson dropped in on you for an evening . . . you wouldn't think of keeping so interesting a visitor all to yourself. You would want your friends in on such a get-together. Periodically through ADVENTURE, that is precisely what he does. Now we appeal to you as a loyal ADVENTURE booster, to share up with your good friends who enjoy a good yarn as well as you. Send in the names and addresses of your cronies to ADVENTURE, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York, N. Y. . . and we will send them free copies of our magazine to get them aboard the good old frigate . . . ADVENTURE.



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Prince Albert Quarter Hour

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